



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Policy statement on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in Belgrade, Serbia, 29th of March, 2014

From rockets and artillery shelling in Gaza to landmines and cluster munitions in Cambodia, the utilization of explosive weapons in populated areas continues to be a constant cause of suffering for civilians worldwide. While tens of thousands of deaths and injuries stem from these attacks each year, the psychological and socio-economic impact is just as staggering. In 2011 the use of explosive weapons in populated areas was identified in 68 countries and territories. Of the approximately 30,000 people killed and injured in those incidents, an estimated 71 percent were civilians.¹ Reportedly, the number of civilian deaths and injuries due to explosive weapons was 26 percent higher in 2012 than in 2011.²

The UK-based organization Article 36, working on reducing the harm from these existing weapons, defines explosive weapons such as artillery shells, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rockets, grenades and bombs amongst others, as “weapons that use high explosive(s) to project blast and/or fragmentation from a point of detonation.”³ As detailed in UNIDIR’s Background Paper on the Discourse on Explosive Weapons (DEW) Project, explosive weapons are considered:

“Weapons that share common characteristics causing injuries, deaths, and damage by projecting explosive blast, heat, and often fragmentation around a point of detonation. These weapons include a variety of munitions such as airdropped bombs, mortars, improvised explosive devices, and artillery shells.”⁴

¹ Action on Armed Violence, “Monitoring explosive violence: The EVMP dataset 2011,”

² Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), “An Explosive Situation: Monitoring Explosive Violence in 2012.”

³ Article 36, “Introduction – explosive weapons.” 28 January 2011.

⁴ Maya Brehm & John Borrie, “Explosive Weapons: Framing the Problem.” Background Paper No. 1 of the Discourse on Explosive Weapons (DEW) project, UNIDIR, www.explosiveweapons.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/DEW-paper-No-1.pdf

These wide impact explosive ordnances cause grave humanitarian and development issues for its victims and survivors, including long-term socio-economic harm and destruction to infrastructure vital to civilians. Additionally, the adverse effects of explosive weapons such as landmines and cluster bombs continue long after the conflict has resolved and/or the combatants have left; creating patterns of wider, long-term suffering for the civilian population.

These weapons also consistently display inaccuracy of delivery. In 2012, in attacks where armed actors were reported to be the target of attacks, innocent civilians made up over half of the recorded casualties. When these attacks occurred in populated areas the civilian casualty amount increased to 80 percent.⁵In their reports, organisation Action on Armed Violence, AOAV, also found that the use of multiple munitions in combination simultaneously across urban areas remained to be the most destructive pattern of explosive violence recorded. In 2012, Syria was reportedly the most-affected by explosive violence with a recorded 23 percent higher casualty rate than Iraq, the second most-affected country in the world. Although data and detailed reporting in Syria still remains limited since the breakout of the civil war in 2011, statistics from both AOAV and the Centre for Documentation of Violations (VDC) claims that more than nine out of every 10 casualties of explosive weapons in Syria last year were civilians.⁶

Even as the rate of government/military air strikes decreases in many conflict-areas, the threat of IED attacks has kept the levels of explosive violence depressingly static. For many armed groups, such as the salafist *Boko Haram* and the many branches of *Al Qaeda*, the use of IEDs has become critical to their warfare and often, a weapon of choice. These weapons can be constructed with ease by non-state actors and are used often to infiltrate inaccessible areas and even terrorize civilians in public areas.

Although Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons requires nation states to record the use of explosive remnants of war (ERW) as well as to clear them after the conflict, there is no international instrument in existence currently to address the problem of explosive weapons in all of their areas, especially with regards to the threat they pose to the civilians affected.

Explosive weapons such as IEDs and car bombs are often the weapons of choice for non-state actors and militia groups, as they can be made using everyday household items, which make these weapons even more difficult to trace and restrict.

Explosive weapons, such as anti-personnel landmines (APLs), have almost always been integral to governments and non-state armed groups as a strategic weapon for area denial. The destructive impact of these devices can resonate for years after the conflict has ended. Both military blocks utilized APLs during the Cold War, with many still being an active obstacle throughout the world. It wasn't until the early 1990s that humanitarian agencies began to recognize the urgency of mine clearance in former war zones. Independently, APLs are great barriers to development. They block access to agricultural land, infrastructure, and public facilities. They create obstacles to livelihood activities, displace thousands and leave thousands of

⁵Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), "An Explosive Situation: Explosive Violence in 2012."

⁶Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), "An Explosive Situation: Explosive Violence in 2012."

disabled victims who require expensive care and assistance. A similar pattern of long-lasting harm is caused by other explosive weapons which are abandoned or fail to explode at their time of use.

As the statistics and reports indicate over the past three years, the majority of casualties of explosive weapons have been civilians, not armed actors the data is staggering and the impact lifelong. More work must be done by nations, civil society and international organizations to counter these unnecessary deaths and the preventable destruction it causes to both societies and infrastructure alike.

Objectives

The Board of the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, meeting in Belgrade, Serbia, 29th of March, 2014;

Acknowledges that the utilization of explosive weapons in populated areas leads to severe harm to both individuals and communities, while creating continued suffering through damage to vital civil infrastructure;

Recognizes and Reiterates its support to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and calls for its full and immediate implementation, with particular attention to Protocol V;

Reaffirms that nation states must review and strengthen national policies and practices on the use of explosive weapons as well as improve methods used for gathering and evaluating available relevant data in line with existing protocols;

Supports the development and implementation of stronger international standards for controlling the use of explosive weapons, including certain prohibitions and restrictions on their use and storage in populated areas;

Recognizes its commitment to the humanitarian objectives of the Antipersonnel Landmine Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and calls for the full and immediate implementation of states obligations under these instruments;

Urges parliamentarians to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the devastating humanitarian impacts of explosive weapons while also increasing community outreach and work for the full realization of the rights of victims and survivors of explosive weapons;

Recognises the need for development of international humanitarian code of conducts and comprehensively addressing root causes of violence and conflict, to better hold non-state actors responsible in their conflict behaviour;

Mandates the Secretariat to follow the development of the impact of explosive weapons, and to take action in line with the adopted policy.