



Press release

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas

## UN and ICRC Joint Appeal: Civilian devastation and suffering must stop

Montreal, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Peter Maurer, issued yesterday an appeal highlighting the devastating impact of explosive weapons on the lives of civilians. They also affirm their strong support for a political declaration to end the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons. Two weeks before the Vienna Conference on explosive weapons in urban warfare, HI welcomes this historical statement as a turning point in this fight, calling on States to commit to find political solutions to this major humanitarian issue.

- “As the world urbanizes, so does armed conflict. When cities are bombed and shelled – whether by airstrikes, rockets, artillery or improvised explosive devices – civilians overwhelmingly bear the brunt”, says the appeal of Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres and President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Peter Maurer. The call also expresses support for a **political declaration** to end the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons: “Civilian devastation and suffering must stop.”
- “The joint statement is a **turning point** in the fight against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It comes from the **two major International Humanitarian Law authorities**: the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, says HI Advocacy Director Anne Héry. It is the **first joint statement recognising the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as a major scourge for civilians and a major humanitarian priority**. It officially acknowledges how serious the situation is for civilians, recognising that they represent **90% of the victims** of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.”
- “Published two weeks before the **Vienna Conference** (October 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019), the appeal calls for the responsibility of States to find a **political solution to better protect civilians in conflict and end civilian devastation and suffering caused by bombing and shelling**, Anne Héry adds. **The upcoming Vienna conference will be an important event on this major issue. The UN and the ICRC have sent a strong message to States to attend the conference and participate in the official diplomatic negotiations that will lead to a political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in 2020.**”

- *“HI has been advocating against bombing in populated for more than 5 years. This week, we have published a report, [The Waiting List](#), that documents the long-term consequences on civilians of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in the Syrian conflict, says Anne Héry. The war machine has inflicted tremendous suffering, carpet-bombing entire neighbourhoods and targeting vital civilian infrastructures. Cities are contaminated whilst roads, electricity networks, water and sewage facilities are damaged. The health system is decimated while medical and rehabilitation needs have increased. This pattern of war must be stopped.”*
- The impact of the use of explosive weapons is devastating for civilians. As conflicts are increasingly fought in cities, civilians represent **90% of the victims**. They represented 15% of victims during WWI and 50% during WWII. This trend in modern conflicts is unacceptable. Armed conflicts are increasingly fought in populated areas, mainly cities.
- Beyond the immediate deaths and injuries, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas leads to the destruction of **essential infrastructure**, including hospitals, schools, water and electricity supply systems. Massive contamination with unexploded ordnances is one of **key drivers of population displacement** across and within borders.
- **On October 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>**, Austria will gather States at the **Vienna Conference to find a political solution to end the harm caused to civilians by bombing in urban warfare**. This recognition by States of the urgency to act is a first victory for civil society! HI – co-founder of the International Network of Explosive Weapons (INEW) – has been campaigning for more than 5 years against bombing in populated areas.
- In the wake of the Vienna Conference, negotiations will lead to the drafting of a **political declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas**. This diplomatic phase should close with a conference early in 2020, when the **political declaration will open for signatures**. During this diplomatic process, HI and partners of the International Network of Explosive Weapons (INEW) **will dialog with States to convince them to fully commit to the cause**.

#### **About Humanity & Inclusion**

HI is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 35 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Since it was founded in 1982, HI has set up development programmes in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. There are eight national associations within the network (Germany, Belgium, Canada, United States, France, Luxembourg, UK and Switzerland), working tirelessly to mobilise resources, co-manage projects and increase the impact of the organisation’s principles and actions. HI is one of six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize and winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. HI takes action and campaigns in places where “living with dignity” is no easy task.

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