

Syria: 9 years of indiscriminate war

Idlib - 1 million forced to flee

Ottawa, 15 March 2020. Almost 1 million people – mainly women and children – have been forced to attempt to flee fighting and bombing in Idlib, northwest Syria since December 2019. Many reports describe the horrific, indiscriminate effects of these attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. HI calls for an immediate ceasefire and for parties to the conflict to stop bombing and shelling areas populated by civilians. HI also urges the Canadian government to fully commit to the international diplomatic process launched last October aimed at better protecting civilians from the use of explosive weapon in populated areas.

More than 900,000 people – mainly women and children – are displaced by escalating violence in Idlib, northwest Syria, since December. Families are stranded in overcrowded camps at the Turkish border, with acute shelter, protection, food, water, hygiene and health needs. They face a freezing winter. Many of them are traumatized and exhausted, having already endured multiple displacements throughout Syria—all in a desperate attempt to escape violence in recent years. **This is the largest displacement of people in 9 years of conflict.**

Massive bombardments in populated areas have had terrible humanitarian consequences: families torn apart, life-changing injuries, psychological trauma, forced displacement, destruction of hospitals, ports, bridges, and other essential infrastructure, and ever-worsening poverty.

"We demand an immediate ceasefire and end to the bombing and shelling of areas populated by civilians, which has increased at a terrifying rate in recent days. These attacks have a horrific impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health centres, internally displaced persons camps, etc., in contradiction with international humanitarian law. Parties to the conflict must also ensure unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance for affected populations," explains Jerome Bobin, Executive Director of Humanity & Inclusion Canada.

"It is total chaos. 3 million people are trapped by fighting and bombing. With the diplomatic process started in Vienna last October and leading to a Political Declaration due to be adopted in Dublin on May 26th this year. States have a historic opportunity to make a real difference in protecting civilians from a major cause of humanitarian catastrophe in modern conflict: the use of explosive weapons in populated areas," adds Jerome Bobin.

Idlib, tragic example of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas

The use of explosive weapons in populated area is intense and repeated in Syria since December 2011. Civilian infrastructures have been hit, including Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, schools, health centres and hospitals. Deliberate attacks on aid workers, medical staff and their facilities were also reported. Many aid organisations have suspended operations.

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) reports that nearly **80,000 people were killed or injured by explosive weapons between 2011 and 2018 in Syria, 87% of which were civilians.** Working in Jordan and Lebanon HI teams are responding to the suffering and trauma of the Syrian population.

Syrians who have sought refuge abroad or in other parts of the country face multiple barriers to returning home. Returning to what's left of their homes is impossible due to the heavy weapons contamination that is choking any near-term chances of social or economic activities restarting. Syria's

essential infrastructure and economy are destroyed and **80% of Syrians currently live below the poverty line.**

Indeed, in Syria, 11,5 million people live amid explosive remnants of war and all the risks that entails, according to [UNMAS](#).

"The consequences of the bombings in populated areas are terrible: families torn apart, devastated cities, entire populations fleeing en masse, explosive remnants contaminating entire neighbourhoods, etc. Syrians are in a dire situation and will need humanitarian aid for many years to come. The country's infrastructure is being destroyed, making access to basic services such as health is a top priority for humanitarian organizations," explains Jerome Bobin.

Diplomatic process to end bombing in urban areas

HI and members of the [International Network of Explosive Weapons \(INEW\)](#) have been urging States to recognize the harm such war practices cause, and to put a stop to it. In part as a result, States, led by Ireland are working on a draft political declaration that would **reduce the use of long-range explosive weapons in populated areas and ensure support to the victims of these weapons. HI and INEW are pushing for the strongest possible language to ensure that States not just avoid this practice of war, but stop it.**

Negotiations for a political declaration to end the use of explosive weapons in populated areas started in Vienna on October 1-2, 2019. Two rounds of negotiations took place in Geneva on November 2019 and February 2020, and will be followed by another round of consultations from March 23 to March 27. This diplomatic process will culminate at a conference scheduled on May 26 in Dublin, where **a political declaration will be opened for endorsements.**

HI calls for citizens' support to mobilize parliamentarians in 8 countries (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States) **and ensure that governments will commit to the cause:** Citizens are invited to write to sign [the international petition](#) against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

About Humanity & Inclusion

Co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for its work banning landmines, Humanity & Inclusion (the new name of Handicap International), is an independent international aid organization working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 38 years. Humanity & Inclusion is one of six founding organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, and winner of the 2011 Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize. Humanity & Inclusion takes action and campaigns in places where "living with dignity" is no easy task. In 2018, Humanity & Inclusion's projects directly benefited 2.1 million people.

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