Comments on Part A, Section 1 – Humanitarian impact

Geneva, 10 February 2020

Ambassador,

I would like to join others in congratulating you and your team in drafting elements of the political declaration. We agree with others that this document provides good bases to adopt a strong political declaration that will save lives and end human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, particularly explosive weapons with wide area effects.

As Humanity and Inclusion, also known as Handicap International, is co-founding member of International Network on Explosive Weapons, we fully endorse the general statement delivered previously. In particular that the Elements Paper should establish a clear presumption against the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas and should better recognise the issue of reverberating effects. We in HI believe that a stronger focus should be put in elaborating what is the impact of explosive weapons on civilians, in PART A, Section 1 – Identifying the problem and challenges.

It should stress out the complexity of the injuries suffered by people exposed to the direct and indirect impact of explosive weapons, and the fact that children are at particularly high risk due to their relatively smaller body weight. Complex injuries can easily lead to death, if emergency assistance is not provided on time, and less lethal injuries can result in pattern of temporary and permanent impairments to body organs and systems, if assistance is not available to injured people.

Therefore, we think it would be necessary to specifically outline in this Section 1, the extent of harm on human bodies and the need for adequate assistance: basic needs of survivors should be met in a timely manner, including with regards to safety, protection, healthcare, shelter, food, water, hygiene and sanitation. In addition, there is a need for safe and timely access to mainstream, personal support and disability-specific services, including emergency and long-term medical care, rehabilitation, education, work, employment, social protection and social inclusion.
Ambassador,

Hundreds of thousands of civilians across more than 100 countries have been killed or injured by explosive weapons in the past decade alone, and 90 percent of those civilian casualties occurred in populated areas. We in HI directly work with and assist thousands of survivors and family members of those injured and killed in more than 30 countries. However, we again failed to engage survivor advocates in these political discussions. And the reason is always the same – people are not ready to speak about their suffering, even those that haven’t been physically injured.

This is of tremendous importance in the context of explosive weapons, where the psychological impact of intense fear caused by bombings and shelling, loss of family members or friends, loss of homes, lack of access to life saving essential services, painful and repeated journeys of escape to safer places, is huge, impacting individuals, entire communities and entire nations, for generations.

Based on that, we strongly encourage you Ireland to ensure a specific focus on the psychosocial impact in in PART A, Section 1 of the political declaration outlining this particular problem, and the assistance that is required to heal invisible injuries. We will submit a detailed paper on this matter after these negotiations.

We believe this elaboration on human focus will justify a need for a strong political declaration that will set a strong humanitarian standard and improve the protection of civilians in practice.

Thank you

END.
Comments on Part B, Section 4 – Humanitarian impact

Geneva, 10 February 2020

Thank you very much ambassador.

As the people affected by conflicts and exposed to the direct and indirect impact of explosive weapons, must remain to be at the centre of all discussions related to ending the harm from explosive weapons, we in Humanity & Inclusion appreciate a standalone commitment on victim assistance in Part B, Section 4 in these elements paper, and we hope to see it in the final draft of the political declaration on explosive weapons.

A commitment in the political declaration should build on internationally recognised standards set forth in the Convention on Cluster Munitions and highlights specific challenges to be addressed when assisting victims in the context of use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Some comments on the language:

“Make every effort”, as it is written in the elements paper now, is not strong enough and should be replaced by “ensure assistance to victims”.

Also, the word “victims” should be understood as: people critically injured, survivors, families of those killed and/or injured and affected communities. Therefore, in our paper that we have submitted after the 1st round of negotiations, we have suggested a following formulation:

- “Ensure that victims - people critically injured, survivors, family members of people killed and/or injured and affected communities – receive adequate assistance based on their needs in a non-discriminatory manner, including in the form of emergency medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support and socio-economic inclusion, as well as support towards the full realisation of their rights and full participation in their societies.”
We highly appreciate the non-discriminatory approach in this commitment, as well as a focus on the rights of persons with disabilities. However we suggest moving the reference to supporting post-conflict stabilisation to another commitment.

We also very much welcome the call related to access to humanitarian aid in 4.4, as this is a crucial to protect civilians affected by conflicts. We think that language however could be strengthened and broaden as access to humanitarian assistance should not only encompass passage of relief convoy. It should refer to unimpeded access to principled and inclusive humanitarian assistance.

Thank you Ambassador.