Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare
Towards a Political Declaration to Address the Humanitarian Harm Arising from the Use of
Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
Geneva Consultations
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Statement on behalf of United Nations and other organizations
engaged in humanitarian action*

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of twenty United Nations and other organizations
engaged in humanitarian action.

As field-based humanitarian and human rights organizations, protecting and assisting millions of
people in the world’s conflict zones, we are acutely aware of the catastrophic humanitarian impact
that results from urban warfare and, in particular, the widespread use of explosive weapons in towns,
cities and other populated areas.

We therefore welcome the attention given to this issue at the Vienna conference last month and the
convening by Ireland of today’s consultation to begin work on a political declaration to address the
devastating humanitarian impact resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, as
recommended by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Such a declaration should recognize the grave humanitarian and human rights consequences that arise
from using explosive weapons in populated areas. This includes the direct effects, such as civilian
deaths and injury and destruction of civilian objects; and also the longer-term, “reverberating effects”,
such as the disruption of essential services, displacement, loss of access to housing, healthcare,
education and livelihoods, and the persistent threat of explosive remnants of war.

A declaration should also contain commitments that will make a meaningful difference to the lives of
conflict-affected populations and that will provide clear political and practical direction and ensure
effective implementation of international humanitarian law.

In particular, a declaration should include an express commitment to avoid the use of explosive
weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and to develop operational policies based on a
presumption against such use, as recommended by the United Nations Secretary-General.

It should, moreover, commit States to:

- Review and adapt their military policy and practice, including doctrine, training and
equipment, so as to better prepare their armed forces for urban warfare.

- Identify, develop and exchange “good practices” in relation to weapon-target matching,
targeting procedures, planning and training, as well as civilian casualty tracking, battle damage
assessments and lessons learned, exports of heavy explosive weapons and support to parties
to armed conflict, to mitigate civilian harm.

- Develop mechanisms and tools to strengthen the collection of data on the types of weapons
used in populated areas and their effects, both direct and indirect, on civilians (disaggregated
by age and sex).
To take all appropriate measures to provide victims of explosive weapons in populated areas with adequate assistance, including in the form of physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support and socio-economic reintegration; and to support and facilitate clearance of explosive remnants of war.

A political declaration that contains these various elements would make a significant and lasting impact in addressing and preventing harm to civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

*Endorsed by:
United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)
CARE
Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
Heartland Alliance International
Humanity and Inclusion (HI)
InterAction
International Rescue Committee (IRC)
INTERSOS
Mercy Corps
Mines Advisory Group (MAG)
Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA)
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
Premiere Urgence Internationale
Save the Children
Secours Islamique France