

First international follow-up conference to the adoption of the *Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA Declaration)*

Outcome statement and recommendations for the way forward

Issued by Costa Rica, Ireland and Norway

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas continues to cause severe humanitarian suffering and destruction in multiple ongoing armed conflicts, including in Gaza, Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. The high toll of civilian deaths and injuries, damage and devastation of critical infrastructure, forced displacement and impediments to humanitarian access and assistance, highlight the urgent need to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict as envisaged in the Political Declaration on EWIPA. The full and meaningful implementation of the Declaration therefore remains an urgent priority as recognised by the United Nations Secretary-General in his 'New Agenda for Peace'.

The first follow-up conference since the adoption of the Declaration in Dublin in 2022 was held in **Oslo on 23 April 2024** and reaffirmed the relevance and importance of the Declaration. It brought together a wide range of stakeholders to review and strengthen implementation of the Declaration. The Oslo Conference took stock of endorsing states' efforts to translate commitments into tangible actions and contributed to ongoing work to promote awareness, foster cooperation and build shared understandings of priority areas, taking into account different regional experiences and approaches.

The Oslo Conference further aimed to increase the number of endorsing states and encourage the continued sharing of good policies and practices to build capacity and assist states considering endorsement. The close and active cooperation between states, international organisations and civil society organisations was recognised as a central driving force of implementation and awareness-raising and serves as a basis for endorsing states to build upon as the Declaration is further embedded within national policies and practices.

Moving forward, the continued promotion of the Declaration in national, regional and international forums is crucial for garnering more endorsements and embedding a normative framework which ensures that the Declaration's principles and standards are widely recognised and implemented. This includes highlighting the Declaration's relevance in diplomatic engagements and international meetings to reinforce the Declaration's commitments and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law. Effective implementation of the Declaration depends on national ownership, the sharing of good practices and the continuous assessment and refinement of national policies and practices as a means to reduce civilian harm.

As the past, present and incoming Chairs of the process, Ireland, Norway and Costa Rica, offered to serve as a *Troika* to provide strategic guidance and to help oversee the

implementation and promotion of the Declaration in advance of the next international follow-up conference.

The Troika reaffirmed that efforts to implement the Declaration at the national level must continue and be reinforced to strengthen the protection of civilians and promote adherence to international humanitarian law, through the development and improvement of policies and practices, and other necessary measures, including:

- policies and practices aimed at avoiding or mitigating civilian harm by restricting or refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas when such use is expected to cause harm to civilians or civilian objects;
- a thorough understanding of the direct and indirect effects of explosive weapons use, through data collection and sharing, and factoring such effects into the planning and conduct of military and security operations;
- increased assistance to victims, including people injured, survivors, families of people killed or injured, and communities affected by armed conflict.

The Troika welcomes Jordan, North Macedonia and Montenegro as states that have endorsed the Declaration since the EWIPA Dublin Conference bringing the total number of endorsing states to 86. We further welcome the active participation of states, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW) and other civil society organisations, survivors, academic communities, and other stakeholders in implementing and promoting the Declaration.

The Troika also recognises the importance of thematic and regional meetings and workshops to raise awareness and strengthen implementation and universalisation of the Declaration. Since the Declaration was endorsed in Dublin in 2022, many such meetings have taken place, including military workshops and expert meetings convened by the Government of Austria, the ICRC, Article 36 and Airwars; a regional workshop for West African states in Togo organised by the Government of Ireland and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA); an expert workshop on data collection by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the Explosive Weapons Monitor; and various briefings and outreach events organised by states, the United Nations, the ICRC and INEW, as well as the Protection Forum organised by INEW and the Norwegian Red Cross prior to the Oslo Conference.

The Troika recognises the leading role played by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs in helping to organise the work of the Declaration and to facilitate coordination among endorsing states and other relevant stakeholders.

The Troika welcomes Costa Rica's offer to host the next international conference in 2025.

The following recommendations are put forward for the endorsing states to consider pursuing in the intersessional period to build on the progress achieved in Oslo and to advance the Declaration's goals.

- To identify national focal points for the Declaration and lead implementation efforts, including disseminating the Declaration and its objectives within the armed forces.
- To share regular updates on national implementation of the Declaration on a voluntary basis and respond to implementation surveys, thereby supporting efforts to monitor implementation.
- To contribute to building an active intersessional programme of work to advance implementation and universalisation of the Declaration. This could take the form of thematic and regional meetings and/or structured intergovernmental and military-to-military exchanges, including multistakeholder participation.
- To accelerate efforts to take stock of implementation and share good policies and practices, and if necessary to review, update and develop national operational policies and practices.
- To continue to foster cooperation between states and international and civil society organisations to promote awareness of the Declaration and to ensure it gains more support and attention in the years to come.
- To conduct outreach and increase engagement to encourage more states to endorse, especially from underrepresented regions, recognising the value of cross-regional support for the Declaration, and the experiences and approaches different regions bring to these efforts. High priority should be given to promoting full adherence to commitments under the Declaration by all parties to conflict.
- To share national examples of policies and practices and lessons learned on implementation, for inclusion on an online portal and information hub hosted by UNODA.

The Troika commits to working towards the implementation and realisation of these recommendations and to supporting endorsing states, and the wider international community, in their efforts to do so. This outcome document represents a collective commitment to strengthen the protection of civilians and address the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and suggests a path forward for enhanced cooperation and action. The Troika calls upon all endorsing states and relevant stakeholders to work towards the full realisation of the Declaration's objectives.