

Statement - Arab Republic of Egypt – EWIPA Oslo, 23rd April 2024

The First International Follow-up Conference
to the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of
Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of
Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

Excellencies...,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the Government of Norway on convening this timely conference to take stock of the implementation of the Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA).

In principle, Egypt supports all endeavors aiming at enhancing the protection of civilians from the devastating consequences of wars and armed conflicts, in accordance with the principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The Egyptian Armed Forces and law enforcement authorities abide by the highest standards in this regard. They implement rules of engagement that strictly follow the principles of humanity, necessity, distinction and proportionality to limit, as far as possible, damage, injury and death to civilian objects in accordance with IHL.

That being said, it is pertinent to reiterate several concerns that Egypt has expressed regarding the substance of the Political Declaration on EWIPA.

First: The declaration lacks a clear definition of the exact scope of its implementation and how it would be compatible with the existing binding norms and principles of IHL. For example, it generally refers to “armed conflicts” without explicitly limiting the scope of the intended measures and restrictions to international armed conflicts and civil wars.

Second: It does not include a clear definition of the term “Explosive Weapons”, which leaves the door wide open to divergent interpretations based on political motivations that might transcend the purposes that the Declaration is supposed to achieve, and to a possible stigmatization of an entire category of conventional weapons that are necessary for legitimate self-defense and law enforcement purposes.

Third: The declaration creates new mechanisms and commitments in broad and general terms, without taking into consideration the specific characteristics of each State’s circumstances, capabilities, and national security concerns. This deepens the aforementioned concerns.

Nevertheless, and in line with our deep and solid belief in the lofty goals for which the Political Declaration is calling, and our strong conviction in the need to improve

compliance with IHL and to protect civilians when conducting military operations, it was our pleasure to accept the invitation of the Government of Norway to participate in this important conference as an observer, with a view to discussing the best means to protect civilians in populated warfare and the challenges lying ahead in an open and collaborative spirit.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is crucial to underscore that this conference is taking place amidst a horrific aggression on Gaza by Israel, with an intolerable toll on civilians due to the extensive inhumane use of several types of explosive weapons in a highly populated area, with devastating impacts on all walks of life, in clear violation of the basic principles of IHL. We would have expected the States endorsing the Political Declaration on EWIPA to unequivocally condemn the acts of Israel which stand in stark contrast to all the principles and actions for which this declaration advocates. However, we think that this conference provides an opportune moment for all participants to speak in once voice against the horrific and devastating conduct of the Israeli forces in Gaza including calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

The ongoing massacre in Gaza provides an excellent litmus test, or at least a case study, to examine how initiatives such as EWIPA could put into action and a make a meaningful difference.

Thank you.