

Geneva Water Hub, PAX and Norwegian People's Aid

Protect Water to Protect Civilians

Joint Statement for the EWIPA Conference Oslo April 2024

We organisations dedicated to the use of water and environment for peace would like to stress:

> That the *duration and predictability of many of the effects* of use of explosive weapons on water systems is much better known (and worse) than we may have originally thought; and

> We are developing ways to allow this deeper knowledge to fuel the *political will* to protect civilians, and *lead to peace*.

A. Our experience tells us:

1. The reverberating effects of damage to water and sewage systems endure longer when the *baseline resilience of urban services* is depleted, and full recovery is hampered for decades by constant insecurity or economic sanctions prohibiting import of spare parts.¹
2. The effects of the use of EWIPA last *longer yet* when they reverberate onto people's health. Every municipality in the world instructs engineers to keep water and sewage lines separate, because if they mix, infectious disease like dysentery, typhoid, and cholera will spread like wildfire. Water and sewage lines *do* mix, however, when war comes to town, as has been documented in many places, including Yemen, Iraq, Gaza before 2021² in Ukraine³ and in Gaza currently.^{4 5}
3. Such outbreaks do not come as surprises. In fact, each of these outbreaks was predicted. *They are foreseeable*. Many of the water-health effects are even - in the language of the EWIPA Declaration and drawing from IHL - *reasonably foreseeable*^{6 7} [EWIPA Declaration 3.4].
4. Worse still is when the drinking water source and the wider environment itself gets contaminated through heavy metals or anti-microbial resistance.⁸
⁹ When this happens, the explosions have eroded the means for survival - and conditions of life for future generations.

B. The Geneva Water Hub PAX and NPA therefore welcome (and will continue to work with) states and other actors to:

1. Develop the body of knowledge on reverberating effects. (Effects which seemed unreasonable to foresee in 1980 or 2000 are today common knowledge - and indeed part of policy);
2. Improve compliance with IHL, by disseminating knowledge like patterns of water and sewage plants into military training manuals;¹⁰
3. Strengthen the legal framework, including blending of Human Rights law into IHL¹¹ which benefit further by the laws aimed at keeping water and the environment from harm's way;^{12 13}
4. Perhaps more importantly, create the political will to regulate the use of EWIPA. Here, we stand ready to strengthen international cooperation (EWIPA Declaration 4.1) and the collaborative spirit (EWIPA Declaration 4.7), for instance through the Global Alliance for the Protection of Water from Armed Conflict which will be launched during the Protection of Civilians week in NY in May 2024;¹⁴ and
5. The ground-breaking and courageous politicians taking forward EWIPA in their countries.

One last point about *peace*, based on the fact that water lines often cross political borders and contact lines. In many conflicts, water is often the last things belligerents will cut off, for pragmatic reasons. Resuming water services is furthermore often one of the first things enemies or former enemies must coordinate over. This technical dialogue can and has been built upon, 'diplomatised' - for discussions about ceasefires, reparations, accountability - peace.



Norwegian People's Aid



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