

Deputy Director Office of Emergency Programmes Hazel De Wet's Remarks (full version)

First international follow-up conference to the adoption of the EWIPA Declaration

Session III: Assisting conflict-affected communities

Tuesday 23 April

- First, let me thank Norway for your leadership both on the EWIPA agenda specifically, but also your broader support and leadership on the children and armed conflict agenda – “The CAAC agenda”. This includes the CAAC Conference in Oslo last June. Thanks as well to Norway for inviting UNICEF to participate in this panel and for including a specific focus on children throughout this conference.
- Indeed, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is one of the biggest threats to children. We see this tragically in Israel and the State of Palestine, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine. And in other conflicts around the world.
- As we have heard in the previous session from Watchlist, the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism - the MRM - provides critical data to inform policymakers about the true impact of Explosive weapons on children and facilitates engagement with parties to conflict.
- UNICEF has been reviewing this data, as part of a retrospective analysis of 5 years of global data on killing and maiming of children. This analysis illustrates a terrifying picture: between 2018 and 2022, explosive weapons were responsible for nearly half of the more than 47,500 instances of children killed or maimed that were verified by the United Nations, in more than 24 conflict zones.
- Moreover, the proportion of children killed or maimed by explosive weapons is an upward trend, reaching almost 57% of all verified child casualties in 2022. In contrast, the proportion of child casualties verified in armed conflict situations caused by firearms, has shown a downward trend, declining to 20% in 2022. This 5-year trend suggests a dynamic shift where explosive weapons are replacing firearms as a leading threat to children in armed conflict situations.
- Worldwide explosive weapons are becoming a ‘weapon of choice’ for armed forces and groups and children pay a very high price for this.
- When 100,000 children live in a part of a city affected by the use of EWIPA we must assume that 100,000 children are at risk.
 - At risk of being killed or injured.
 - At risk of being displaced.

- At risk of psychological trauma.
- And at risk of reverberating effects of EWIPA such as lack of access to clean water, education, health and other essential services.
- Behind each of these numbers is a story of terrible child suffering ... of rights violated and rights denied.
- As we just heard in the previous plenary session, when explosive weapons are used in populated areas the education and future of children is in jeopardy. The 2024 report from the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack reported an increase in the use of explosive weapons in attacks on education
- I am reminded of the story of 15-year-old Walaa from the Sudan – visible in the photo exhibit outside this hall: last year, one evening, her neighbour’s house was bombed, tragically killing everyone inside. Gripped by fear and panic, Waala and her family scattered in different directions. Waala and her sister were separated from the rest of family. Following other families on the road, they embarked on a four-day journey, with no idea of where they would end. With no shoes, they trekked miles under the scorching sun until they found a safe place with relatives.
- With partners UNICEF provided a safe space for Waala, a space with a sense of normalcy. She frequents it, cherishing the opportunity to learn English and engage in sport. She has also received counselling sessions from a dedicated psychologist. Hundreds of children like Walaa who frequent this space receive professional support from social workers and psychologists who have been trained in mental health and psychosocial support.
- Separated, then reunited, but with hard memories for life: one year on, Walaa endures the continuing impact of the brutal use of EWIPA.
- This is the story of one survivor who luckily was not injured and received assistance. It sheds light on the immense suffering of thousands of children who see their lives shattered by these weapons, and the risk of psychological, and social impacts that can persist throughout their lifetimes.
- When the use of EWIPA cannot be prevented we also must ensure children have access to food, shelter, education, clean water, social support and health care.
- Attacks like the one suffered by Walaa are neither acceptable nor inevitable. They can be prevented if all of us take all actions within our power, including the endorsement and implementation of the political declaration. Each of us must raise our voices and leverage our individual and collective power to oppose their use in populated settings.
- Excellencies, honored guests, colleagues. We have the evidence:

- Meaningful action to prevent the use of explosive weapons in populated areas could almost halve number of child casualties in conflicts!
- UNICEF calls Member States to use any opportunity to speak out about the devastating impact of EWIPA on children and to honor your promise to “actively promote the Declaration”.
- We call member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.
- We urge warring parties around the world to cease the use of EWIPA.
- Finally, UNICEF calls Member States to provide sustained, financial support for interventions that will protect children from EWIPA:
 - We need to invest on stronger injury surveillance systems that are age, gender, disability and diversity sensitive;
 - We need to scale up “conflict preparedness and protection” programmes to reduce the risk of being harmed when there is active bombing and shelling;
 - We need more explosive ordnance risk education, as well as clearance, and victim assistance.

Children are not a target. They are the future. And we must protect them.