



**Statement of the Holy See at the
International Conference on the follow-up to the “Political Declaration on Strengthening
the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of
Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA)”**

Session 3: Assisting conflict-affected communities

Oslo, 23 April 2024

Madame/Mr. Moderator,

Almost two years after 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 at the First Follow-up Conference, the Holy See remains deeply concerned about the use of explosive weapons, especially in populated areas.

This is why the Holy See decided to endorse the Political Declaration, urging that it finds a concrete implementation, hopefully bringing about a shift from the paradigm of “collateral damage” to the one of “intended protection” of the civilian population, so as to truly minimize, or, still better, avoid the loss of innocent human lives.¹

The reality on the ground leaves no doubt about the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, even after the end of the hostilities. In spite of the existing and internationally agreed legal protections, a very large number of civilians are not only to be among the victims of armed conflicts, but also targets. In this regard, the Holy See wishes to recall that the “legal” limits of warfare should not be the only criteria of acceptability, and that the cumulative effects of the use of explosive weapons should also be taken into account.²

Regrettably, as Pope Francis affirmed, in a context where it appears that the distinction between military and civilians objects is no longer respected, “there is no conflict that does not end up in some way indiscriminately striking the civilian population. The events in Ukraine and Gaza are clear proof of this. We must not forget that grave violations of international humanitarian law are war crimes, and that it is not sufficient to point them out, but also necessary to prevent them.”³

¹ Cf. Statement of the Holy See to the 2023 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW, 16 November 2023, Geneva

² Cf. Statement of the Holy See Delegation 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)”, Dublin, 18 November 2022.

³ Pope Francis, Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, 8 January 2024.

Madame/Mr. Moderator,

In the midst of multiple armed conflicts and current humanitarian emergencies, which Pope Francis described as a “third world war being fought piecemeal”, the Holy See, including through the various institutions of the Catholic Church on the ground, remains committed to continuing its humanitarian assistance to those in need and their families, without making distinction on the basis of religious or ethnic identity. Moreover, the Catholic Church, through its institutions on the ground, seeks to ensure also the psychological and spiritual dimensions of assistance.

The highest aspirations of humanity is the elimination of conflicts and the achievement of peace and justice, therefore Holy See is convinced that the real and long-lasting solution ultimately lies in the promotion of a culture of peace, which includes justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Thank you, Madame/Mr. Moderator.