

The 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).



Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel, Oslo, 22–24 April 2024

Session 3

Assisting conflict-affected communities

Statement by MAG

Check against delivery.

Thank you Chair,

We are living in a global context of unprecedented rates of casualties and extreme human suffering, with basic rules of international humanitarian and human rights law constantly challenged. Tens of thousands lost their lives in places such as Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, Syria, and Yemen; and an even greater number are suffering long-term consequences caused by the reverberating effects of these weapons.

Although this Declaration is in its infancy, the problems it aims to address have long been clear. MAG's thousands of dedicated staff – many of whose own communities are directly affected – work tirelessly to mitigate those effects, implement humanitarian mine action, and create the conditions for the full enjoyment of human rights and development.

To mention just a few examples, in places such as Lebanon and Iraq, explosive ordnance and other explosive devices limit people's movement, obstruct the safe enjoyment of family houses, prevent development, and cause food insecurity, as shown in a recent study by MAG on Lebanon. Furthermore, active conflicts, such as the one in Lebanon, are affecting decades of progress and require new and more extended national response.

Immediate and long-term response to armed conflict should be well coordinated and include humanitarian mine action. Humanitarian disarmament operators should be flexible and adapt to the different phases of the humanitarian-development nexus, as MAG wrote in a recent article for the International Review of the Red Cross on the application of the humanitarian principles.

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We are glad to see explosive ordnance risk education and clearance mentioned in paragraph 3.5 of the Declaration. Explosive ordnance risk education is critical and should be prioritised, to prevent harm, even in times of emergency, such as active hostilities or cross-border movements of displaced population. We must also consider how the Declaration can be used as a framework to continue strengthening mine action efforts to protect civilians in conflict and as long as explosive ordnance pose a significant level of risk.

We must bear in mind that often local actors are on the frontline of this response, and it is therefore essential to consider how to support these actors in crisis situations. It is fundamental to support appropriate response capacities where needed, without forgetting those countries that are not in the media headlines despite their urgent and significant needs.

The Declaration is also a framework for the facilitation and coordination of different relevant activities, including in activities such as collecting data, critical to inform any humanitarian response. Early and accurate contamination data is the best means to ensure effective intervention for the safety and security of people and communities.

MAG is actively engaging with other stakeholders to strengthen research to better understand reverberating effects, combining technical, political, and thematic experience and expertise. Comprehensive research on the environmental impact of explosive ordnance in populated areas is also needed.

The EWIPA Declaration is an ambitious framework that can be used to significantly reduce both immediate and long-term suffering and harm caused by explosive weapons. We must approach the Declaration and its implementation with imagination and commitment if we are to address the unacceptable levels of suffering and harm that we, as a community, have resolved to stand against.

I thank you, Chair.