

Chair, distinguished delegates,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of four organisations working on the links between EWIPA and the environment: PAX, Geneva Water Hub, CEOBS, and NPA, which I represent.

Copies of a briefing paper are available at the back of the room, but please allow me to quickly summarize the content:

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas inflicts not only immediate humanitarian devastation but also acute and long-term environmental damage.

Contamination of air, soil and water resources can endanger civilian lives and undermine livelihoods.

Blast damage releases pollutants, for example by pulverising building materials such as asbestos, leading to dispersal of small particles.

Fires generate toxic combustion products.

Pollutants can contaminate soils, or leach into watersources and groundwater and people can be exposed to these substances through inhalation, and through the consumption of contaminated food and water.

In Ukraine, Syria, Gaza and Sudan, more than two hundred and sixty million tonnes of conflict debris have been generated. Sometimes mixed with hazardous materials from commercial, energy and industrial infrastructure.

Managing conflict debris is challenging, workers and residents face exposures from pollutants, and waste dumping is common, dispersing pollution and damaging landscapes. Reconstruction generates massive greenhouse gas emissions and places pressure on local natural resources.

Damage to water infrastructure indispensable to civilians also has environmental and health implications. Soils, surface and groundwaters can be polluted by wastewater from damaged treatment facilities - compounding the health risks from the loss of drinking water, as in Gaza where more than 85% of wells and pipelines have been damaged.

Implementing the EWIPA declaration can help address environmental harm.

Clause 3.1 commits endorsers to 'review, develop or improve national policy and practice. 3.4 requires that their armed forces ensure that they 'take into account the direct and indirect effects on civilians and civilian objects which can reasonably be foreseen in the planning of military operations and the execution of attacks in populated areas, and conduct damage assessments, to the degree feasible, and identify lessons learned'.

Building on these commitments that endorsing states have undertaken, we call on endorsers:

- to ensure that environmental considerations are fully integrated in the planning of military operations and in determining the acceptability of actions.
- to support the collection of environmental data in populated areas affected by the use of explosive weapons and use it to inform harm reduction policies.
- to align the implementation process of the political declaration with relevant environmental guidance, including UN Environment Assembly resolution 6.12 on measuring conflict-linked environmental damage.

The environment is an integral part of human life and must be protected from the effects of armed conflict and EWIPA use.

Thank you chair.