

United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action
First international follow-up conference
Oslo, Norway

Statement on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
Delivered by Mr. Pehr Lodhammar, UNMAS

Oslo, 23 April 2024

Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this statement on behalf of the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

The United Nations partners appreciate the commitment of the EWIPA Declaration signatories to international law relevant to the use of explosive weapons, to reduce and respond to the devastating consequences of these weapons on civilians.

As recognized by the signatories, United Nations mine action partners have a crucial role to play to address “the impacts and humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.” (1.9). We would like to contribute to the exchange and compilation of good policies and practices, emerging concepts and terminology to advance implementation of the declaration (4.7).

UN mine action programmes support national authorities to develop the standards and policies that underpin the training of their armed forces on the appropriate use, storage and disposal of specific explosive weapons and, in some case, on the techniques to search and detect of weapons intended to harm civilians or security forces.

Dedicated standards and information management systems concerning explosive weapons in populated areas and their impact, and appropriate operational procedures, will prepare mine action implementers to address the consequences of their use effectively and safely. International Mine Action Standards to address the consequences of explosive weapons in populated areas safely and effectively should also be developed.

UN mine action programmes support national efforts to mark, clear and remove or destroy Explosive Remnants of War as soon as feasible, and support the provision of risk education (3.5). Our programmes contribute to these goals in Ethiopia, Iraq, Ukraine, Syria, South Sudan and Sudan. In Iraq, UNMAS has conducted survey and clearance of explosive ordnance in two thousand urban areas with critical infrastructure in the last seven years. In Ukraine, UNDP is working in urban settings with significant amounts of debris. For Gaza, the UN and its partners are developing contingency plans integrating explosive ordnance detection and clearance in debris management.

We appreciate the support of donor signatories for our efforts to gather data on the impact of EWIPA on civilians, provide rapid safe and unhindered humanitarian access, support assistance to victims, and address the direct and indirect humanitarian impact of EWIPA (4.3-4.6).

When access is limited, we must consider how to innovatively use new technology and digital opportunities for information gathering, strategic and tactical level planning, preparations, and coordination. The possibilities of using open-source information for remote damage assessments and operational planning, for example, represent an opportunity we must embrace.

We use evidence-based advocacy to call for limiting and preventing the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. However, we observe many states and non-state actors in conflict settings becoming increasingly unmoored from

normative frameworks. In such circumstances, and until effective measures to compel or coerce respect for IHL are activated, we do our utmost to mitigate the risks to civilians through context-specific, well-targeted preparedness and prevention messaging delivered most appropriately through well-targeted Explosive Ordnance Risk Education to build the resilience of affected communities, returnees, mine action operators, humanitarian actors and rubble removal personnel at risk.

The 27th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and UN Advisers (NDM-UN 27) will dedicate a plenary session to risk education and resilience on 29 April.

In conclusion, the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action reaffirms its unwavering commitment to collaborate with international and national partners to apply relevant expertise and experience to address the threats posed by explosive weapons in populated areas.

Thank you.
