

NGOs reaction to the Parliamentarian Hearing held at the National Defense Commission on 6th January

Over the last decades, towns, villages and other populated areas have become the centers of the vast majority of armed conflicts. There, the use of heavy explosive weapons, also known as explosive weapons with wide area effectsⁱ such as heavy aircraft bombs or artillery, represents a major risk for civilians. For instance, in the period 2011-2019 90% of the people killed in populated areas by explosive weapons were civiliansⁱⁱ. The use of these weapons also has a critical impact on key civilian infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, markets, electricity facilities, water and sanitation systems as well as bridges, houses and roads. Additionally, it poses huge challenges to the safe return of displaced populations due to the disruption or lack of essential civilian services (such as healthcare) and the soil contamination by explosive remnants of war.

Last week, **the National Defense Commission of the Belgian Federal Parliament convened to discuss the draft resolution n° 1222/1 on the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.** Such resolution is a good step in the right direction as it clearly demands the Belgian Federal Government for an unequivocal commitment against the use of high-impact explosive weapons in populated areas, in line with the presumption of non-use; a recognition of the "domino effects" of wide-range explosive weapons; and a commitment to victim assistance and unconditional access to humanitarian aid. After dozens of parliamentary questions, motions and public hearings in France, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg and the UK the adoption of **this resolution would be pioneering** as it is the first of its kind.

Airwars, HI, PAX and Pax Christi commend the effort made by the co-authors of this draft resolution and welcome the attention the members of the National Defense Commission paid to this crucial topic. Ireland plans on resuming the diplomatic process this year, and to start by sharing the revised political declaration text in January. While we approach the next round of consultations for a political declaration, **we call on the Belgian MPs to adopt the resolution without hesitation and to step forward as a country that strongly promotes the protection of civilians in armed conflict.**

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ⁱ The explosive weapons that raise specific concerns when used in populated areas are those having wide-area effects. Explosive weapons might affect a wide area because of the large destruction radius of the individual munition used, the inaccuracy of the delivery system, and/or the delivery of multiple munitions over a wide area.” See <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/explosive-weapons-populated-areas-use-effects>

ⁱⁱ AOAV, *Explosive Violence Monitor 2019*, <https://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Explosive-Violence-Monitor-2019-corrected-02.09.pdf>