

Strategic Plan 2026-2030

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The world continues to be divided by bitter conflicts, with widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the rapid development and deployment of radical new military technologies. These trends are contributing to grave levels of civilian harm alongside growing challenges to the legal and normative structures that were built to limit suffering in armed conflicts.

At the same time, political polarisation, rejection by some states of humanitarian disarmament norms, and much reduced funding to our sector, are reshaping the environment within which we operate.

Article 36 is working to strengthen the protection of civilians through new initiatives to understand and respond to harm, and by building new partnerships among states, international organisations and civil society, to effectively support rules and norms to protect people from war.

This strategic plan provides the framework through which we are approaching our work from 2026 to 2030.

Who we are

Article 36 is a specialist non-profit organisation, made up of policy and advocacy experts based in the UK, and focussed on reducing harm from weapons. The organisation takes its name from article 36 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which calls for scrutiny of new weapons and methods of warfare.

In partnership with states and civil society, we analyse patterns of harm and develop new policies and legal standards to protect people from existing and emerging weapons.

Individually and as Article 36, we have a strong track record of developing practical policies and major legal instruments, including:

- The 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions
- The 2015 Safe Schools Declaration
- The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
- The 2022 Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

From framing humanitarian issues and shaping civil society responses, to convening key political meetings and expert presentations in international treaty negotiations, we provide a critical voice on the role of weapons in the world.

Our vision

- A world with the minimum reliance on weapons.
- A world where the development, use and impact of weapons is understood and controlled to protect people and ensure accountability.
- A world where civilian protection matters and people affected by conflict are supported to achieve better standards of life in larger freedom.

Our mission

- To reduce harm from weapons.
- To work for the adoption and implementation of practices, policies and legal controls to prevent harm.
- To work with partners for international rules and norms that foster and reinforce this mission.

Our values and principles

- We believe in pursuing non-violent solutions to problems.
- We believe that challenging weapons is one foundation for challenging violence in society.
- We believe that how weapons are developed and used, and the impact they have, should be publicly scrutinised, based on evidence, transparency and a diversity of social perspectives.
- We believe policies and legal agreements can respond to humanitarian concerns and support a normative framework that reduces harm from weapons.
- We recognise that strong partnerships are vital.

Our strategic aims

Over the period 2026-2030 will focus on its work on four interconnected workstreams:

- Advancing state policy and practice to reduce civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Preserving human control and human dignity in the context of autonomous weapons and military AI.
- Reinforcing established humanitarian norms against weapons and contributing to strong civil society coalitions and partnerships.
- Promoting a new policy framework for the full protection of civilians.



Strategic focus

2026 – 2030

1. Advancing policy and practice to protect civilians from explosive weapons in populated areas

We will work to:

- Convene and support key states and organisations to develop and advance political strategies linking international commitments with national policies and operational practices.
- Build trusted partnerships with militaries to translate political commitments into military doctrine, training and operational practice;
- Sustain engagement with African states and civil society partners to strengthen regional leadership and engagement on weapons and protection issues;
- Apply technical analysis of the wide area effects of explosive weapons and their relationship to civilian harm;
- Strengthen collective action through INEW and related partnerships.

The change we want to see:

- Evidence on weapons effects and civilian harm drives recognition of the specific risks of using explosive weapons in populated areas, and leads to their systematic integration into national policy, military doctrine, and operational planning and guidance;
- Civilian harm from bombing towns and cities is re-centred and de-normalised in political and public debate;
- Strong and visible political leadership on EWIPA, including from African states and other regional champions.

Landmark goals:

- A new international ambition to reject the use of certain wide-area explosive weapons in towns and cities, reflected in political commitments and policy positions;
- A growing group of states demonstrating changes in policy and military practice on the use of explosive weapons, supported by a strong multistakeholder community of practice;
- Recognised political leadership, including from African states, and trusted partnerships with military actors from endorsing states.

2. Preserving human control and human dignity in the context of autonomous weapons and military AI

We will work to:

- Engage with emerging technologies to set and maintain a critical agenda on AI in the military domain;
- Build the expectation that transformative new technologies need new rules and norms to ensure civilian protection;
- Provide technical and policy expertise to shape the international discourse;
- Convene and support committed states to develop and lead political strategies;
- Ensure core values of equality, human dignity and accountability guide the development of international law and policy in these areas.

The change we want to see:

- Recognition that autonomous weapon systems need an international legal response;
- A political strategy that takes partner states and key stakeholders through negotiations to the adoption of a legal instrument;
- A more critical discourse on AI in the military domain that starts to propose boundaries on the use of these technologies;

- Innovative policy proposals for how individual people, and political entities, can reject the siphoning of their data into systems of military and security analysis.

Landmark goals:

- A track of negotiations for an international instrument on autonomous weapons.
- A distinct critical agenda on AI-targeting systems.

3. Reinforcing existing norms on weapons and strengthening coalitions

We will work to:

- Support states and civil society to reaffirm the continued relevance of humanitarian norms against weapons, grounded in evidence, survivor perspectives, and documentation of harm;
- Analyse and respond to political, military and other ‘counter-normative’ arguments that seek to weaken existing rules and norms;
- Promote dynamic discussions that ensure normative instruments are relevant to operational policy and practice;
- Build and strengthen partnerships to advance a broad pro-normative agenda and reinforce the political value of upholding humanitarian rules;
- Support effective and sustainable ways of organising and collaborating across civil society coalitions.

The change we want to see:

- States demonstrate sustained political commitment to existing rules and norms, publicly defending them, taking practical steps to strengthen them, and integrating them within broader security, humanitarian, and civilian protection agendas.
- Evidence of harm provide the foundation for action and claims of military utility necessity are subject to serious and transparent scrutiny.

- Civil society coalitions learning from the past, adapting to the present by adopting new ways to organise support for disarmament and the protection of civilians.

Landmark goals:

- Increased ratification and accession to the Mine Ban Treaty and Convention on Cluster Munitions, with European states aligned with the global majority in actively supporting these instruments and the wider field of rules and norms;
- More effective and sustainable ways of organising and collaborating across civil society coalitions, supporting revitalised, interconnected, and mutually supportive partnerships.

4. Promoting a new policy framework for the full protection of civilians.

We will work to:

- Establish a recognition that civilian interests must be positively upheld, by working to expand civilian protection beyond existing legal requirements;
- Build a new partnership of states and civil society working to protect people from war.
- Energise belief that upholding the interests of vulnerable people still mobilises international political support and cross-regional partnerships.

The change we want to see:

- States and key stakeholders are committed to expanding civilian protection;
- New partnerships of states and stakeholders working together to promote civilian protection and international law;
- A political strategy to build support for this position in the international policy agenda.

Landmark goals:

- A new agenda established to work for the full protection of civilians, protecting people from war.



Approach

Organisational management

To deliver this strategy effectively in a demanding environment, Article 36 will maintain a strong organisational foundation that supports organisational impact and staff wellbeing. We will remain a small, highly skilled organisation, supported by good management and attention to staff wellbeing. We will strengthen systems for monitoring, learning, and adaptation, enabling us to reflect on experience and respond to changing contexts. We will manage hosting and institutional responsibilities in ways that are aligned with organisational capacity and strategic priorities, and maintain robust financial management to ensure stability.

Focus and selectivity

To maximise impact in a demanding external environment, and in recognition of the pressures placed on individuals and organisations, Article 36 will make deliberate and disciplined choices about how it invests its time and resources. We will prioritise high-impact policy leadership, political engagement with states, and evidence-based advocacy on the thematic areas of work we have outlined. We will also support effective and sustainable approaches to coalition governance and collaboration. This focus and selectivity will enable Article 36 to remain effective, independent and resilient.

Partnerships

Article 36 recognises the essential role of multistakeholder and innovative partnerships in translating policy goals into meaningful change. We will continue to place partnerships at the centre of our work and remain embedded in collaborative international processes with states, international organisations, and civil society. At the same time, as a small organisation and in recognition of the demands of coalition coordination, we will generally move away from operational leadership roles and focus instead on strategic leadership, coalition sustainability, and policy and political engagement within collaborative frameworks. This approach reflects our commitment to strong partnerships while safeguarding organisational capacity and independence.

Core activities

Our core activities will be in three interconnected areas, and in each of those areas we will be pioneering new work, learning from the past and reflecting on, and challenging, the role of this work in the wider international environment. This will primarily be done by:

Convening multistakeholder meetings and discussions, both to develop existing agendas and to pioneer new initiatives. Effective meetings serve as critical points for shaping thinking, building partnerships and setting the course for future work.

Producing innovative policy thinking and other practical resources and guides for work. Article 36 has a long history of producing imaginative policy thinking that has become central to international discussions.

Organising with key partners and in processes of work with states and organisations to develop strategies and effective responses across our sector. We continue to work within both formal and informal coalitions and will seek to innovate within these structures to ensure civil society is effective in the current environment.

Conclusion

The current international environment presents stark challenges for this sector of work. Shifting political attitudes and a constrained funding landscape are likely to drive a reconfiguration of civil society organisations in this area over the next five years.

Article 36 will orientate to this context by being streamlined, flexible and dynamic. We will stay small and keep our cost base low.

We will be measured in our engagement with external structures, balancing our responsibilities to partners with the need to preserve organisational capacity.

We will remain committed to our core humanitarian focus acting as a convenor, challenger, and catalyst for change. Importantly, we will continue to believe that positive change is possible towards the full protection of civilians from weapons and conflict.

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