

UN: Start dialogue to tackle explosive weapons in populated areas

AOAV update, 16 July 2010

The Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs/ERC has highlighted the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which he says “repeatedly causes unacceptably high levels of civilian harm.” Mr. Holmes called for more research into the issue, urging the UN Security Council to begin dialogue to start tackling the problem.

[Addressing the Security Council on 7 July 2010](#), Mr. Holmes stated that the harmful effects of explosive weapons is one of five key issues regarding protection of civilians in conflict, during a day-long Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.

Mr. Holmes emphasized the wide-spread risks to civilians caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas – from air strikes, artillery, rockets, car bombs, suicide attacks, and IEDs – across a range of countries including Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Gaza, Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, Iraq, and India, as well as the indiscriminate threat to civilians posed by landmines and cluster munitions long after conflicts have ended.

While calling for more research on the harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in areas where civilians are present, Mr. Holmes stated that “there is already enough tragic experience to encourage serious reflection on the military use of such weapons in such circumstances when measured against the enormous human suffering they cause.” He urged the Security Council to begin a dialogue on ways to tackle the problem of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) welcomes the UN’s call to action, recognising the unacceptably high level of civilian harm caused by explosive weapon use in populated areas. According to AOAV research, during the last two weeks alone, hundreds of civilians were killed and injured by explosive weapon use in populated areas of Kosovo, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uganda.¹

Background

In May 2009, the UN released the 2009 [Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict](#), which expressed growing concern over the severe and indiscriminate humanitarian impact caused by explosive weapon use, particularly in densely populated areas. In August 2009, Action on Armed Violence released “[Explosive Violence – The Problem of Explosive Weapons](#),” which examines the patterns of civilian harm caused by these weapons, through direct deaths and injuries to psychological harm, socio-economic losses, damage to infrastructure, and lingering unexploded ordnance. The UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) has since launched the [Discourse on Explosive Weapons Project](#) (DEW), which aims to take forward the debate on explosive weapons towards better protection of civilian populations.

¹ This research is part of an ongoing AOAV project documenting incidents of unacceptable civilian harm caused by explosive weapons in populated areas. From the five incidents selected during the period 01.07.2010–14.07.2010, in Kosovo (02.07.2010), India (06.07.2010), Afghanistan (08.07.2010), Pakistan 09.07.2010) and Uganda (11.07.2010), it was possible to estimate a figure of 355 deaths and injuries. This figure cannot be taken as the total number of deaths and injuries caused during that period, as there were many incidents of explosive weapons use in populated areas which were not documented as part of this project.