

Article36

Strategic Plan: 2019-2023

Updated, January 2020

Strapline/motto: A critical voice on weapons.

Foreword:

Article 36 is a specialist non-profit organisation, focussed on reducing harm from weapons. A small and effective team of advocacy and policy experts based in the UK, we take our 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.

Together with civil society partners and governments, we develop new policies and legal standards to prevent civilian harm from existing and emerging weapons. This is underpinned by our rigorous, transparent and independent analysis of how weapons harm civilians, and how to reduce and prevent such harm.

Developing international laws and standards takes time: the adoption of a treaty is typically the result of a decade's work. Treaties also require effective support after they have been signed. Therefore, we are part of the leadership teams for several international disarmament coalitions, including the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which won the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize. We also provide leadership and expertise within the [International Network on Explosive Weapons \(INEW\)](#) and the [Campaign to Stop Killer Robots](#). Article 36 is grateful for support from a wide range of government and private organisations, including the governments of Norway, Ireland and Switzerland, Open Society Foundations and DeepMind, and are pleased to partner with academic institutions, including Harvard Law School and the University of Exeter.

Through our innovative policy work and close partnerships, our small team exerts significant strategic influence. Article 36's impact is visible in new and creative framings of challenges. For example, our framing of the need for 'meaningful human control' over autonomous weapons systems has become central to how state representatives, UN bodies, coalition partners and other humanitarian and human rights organisations talk about legal standards around the potential use of artificial intelligence in weapons.

Reframing the problem can help move deadlocked discussions to signed treaties. For example, a 2013 report by Article 36 outlined that a treaty banning nuclear weapons did not depend on the agreement of nuclear armed states, who historically oppose such rules. As members of the ICAN Steering Group, we rallied a wider coalition around this idea. Drawing on our professional network, we hosted a series of informal, small-group meetings, bringing

together diplomats and other important stakeholders. These multi-stakeholder planning discussions were key to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons being adopted in 2017.

Our impact can also be seen in the inclusion of humanitarian concerns in international weapons agreements. Article 36 overcame initial ambivalence from other negotiators to make sure that assisting victims of nuclear weapons use and testing, and cleaning up contaminated environments, was part of the 2017 treaty.

Our team has more than a decade of experience in diplomatic negotiations and in developing practical, actionable policies. From framing humanitarian issues and shaping civil society responses, to convening key political meetings and presenting as experts in international treaty negotiations, we provide a critical voice on the role of weapons in our world.

Our vision:

- A world with the minimum reliance on weapons.
- A world where the development, use and impact of weapons is controlled and scrutinised to ensure the greatest protection of the public, and the greatest accountability of users.
- A world where these conditions are supported through strong norms backed by an active partnership of states and civil society.

Our mission:

- To reduce harm from weapons, to promote strong controls over the development and use of weapons and to reduce the perceived importance of violence as a means of securing our common future.
- To publicly scrutinise the development and use of weapons and the harm they cause and to work for the adoption of practices, policies and legal controls to prevent harm.
- To work with partners for the development and implementation of international norms that foster and reinforce this mission.

Our values and principles:

- We believe in pursuing non-violent solutions to problems.
- We believe that consideration and control of the tools of violence is one foundation for effective and appropriate social control of violence.
- We believe that how weapons are developed and used should be publicly and independently scrutinised, based on evidence, transparency and a diversity of social perspectives.
- We recognise the power and importance of social norms as a framework within which behaviours are understood and assessed.

- We believe policies and legal agreements can respond to humanitarian concerns and support a normative framework that reduces harm from weapons.
- We work with partners, in civil society, international organisations and states, to forge a common language, to frame problems, and shape effective solutions.
- We recognise that strong partnerships are vital to shaping new norms and ensuring that established norms continue to support the prevention and reduction of harm.

Our strategic aims:

Five strategic aims will guide our programmes of work over the next five years and we will judge our success against them.

1. We will work towards the development of new international standards to reduce the harm from weapons and protect civilians from armed conflict

Legal and political instruments that work to strengthen the protection afforded to civilians by preventing the use of certain weapons are a central focus of Article 36's work. The community that Article 36 forms part of led the creation of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, the 2001 Protocol V to the CCW on Explosive Remnants of War, the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions and the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, as well as a number of important political agreements.

Although such agreements do not prevent conflict and violence, these legal and policy tools should work progressively to curb some of the worst effects of violence. Article 36 believes that this should be a continuous process – resisting claims that current practice is sufficient and maintaining pressure on states to do more to protect the vulnerable.

Established instruments function in a number of important ways. For those states that adopt them they provide a direct constraint on the weapons they may use. More broadly they establish or strengthen the 'stigma' associated with certain weapons or practices – which bears even upon states that reject these instruments. Finally, these treaties have driven practical action to help affected communities – such as through the clearance of landmines and work to promote the rights of victims.

Article 36 will continue to promote the development of new international standards, working to prevent and reduce harm caused by weapons and to promote a concept of statehood that draws political authority from constraint and accountability regarding the use of weapons.

The change we want to see:

- A: We want to see new agreements proposed, developed and adopted on pressing current issues, including on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the development of autonomy in weapons systems.

- B: We wish to see new problem framings, that describe evidence on the harm caused by weapons in terms that offer potential for the development of policy and legal responses.
- C: We want to see greater emphasis on documenting and analysing the harm caused by weapons, from the impact on individuals to the wider societal and environmental effects.
- D: We want a political discourse that takes harm to civilians seriously and is self-confident in its consideration of that harm and in consideration of ways in which it could be prevented.

Our priorities for the next five years:

What: The formal adoption of new political or legal international instruments working to reduce harm from weapons.

How: We will support the development and adoption of a political declaration to address the impact on civilians of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We will also work for the development of an international legal instrument ensuring that meaningful human control is retained in the context of increasing autonomy in weapons systems.

What: New lines of policy consideration regarding weapons being taken up in international forums.

How: We will continue to develop new policy lines that provide opportunities for development towards the stronger protection of civilians. Whether strategic framings that can shape whole conversations, or detailed positions to solve specific policy problems, Article 36 has confidence in its capacity for transformative policy thinking.

What: A renewed engagement on understanding harm from weapons, amongst civil society partners and amongst states.

How: We will work to build a better structured model of the types of harm produced by weapons and the ways in which consideration of those harms is limited in international policy conversations. Such a model will work to bring into those discussions types of harm that are often systematically excluded.

What: An open ongoing dialogue between states, international organisations and civil society regarding harms caused by weapons and the mechanisms by which harm can be prevented.

How: We will continue to convene multi-stakeholder meetings, as well as publishing and presenting research, in order to facilitate shared understandings of the harm caused by weapons and the opportunities for limiting that harm.

2. We will work to uphold established norms against weapons and promoting rights of victims

International legal and policy instruments have effect not simply as words written on the page, but from the activity that is undertaken under the framework that they provide. Speaking out against breaches of their norms and following through on commitments to destroy prohibited weapons and to address harm that has been caused are vital to making such agreements an effective social force.

Article 36 staff have worked on the development of a number of international legal instruments and we sit on the governing bodies of civil society coalitions that continue to support those instruments. We recognise that progressive strengthening of civilian protection needs effective implementation of commitments already made. Sometimes this involves working for additional states to join those instruments - and always it involves working to see respect of the norms that an instrument embodies.

From the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, through the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions to the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, modern weapon-related instruments have sought to respond to the interests of the people and communities harmed by weapons. Whilst the implementation of such responses in practice is conditioned by many factors, Article 36 believes that the connection of legal instruments to the people that experience harm is of vital importance.

The change we want to see:

- A: We want existing instruments to provide a framework for dynamic discussions on how harm can be reduced - not formulaic diplomatic statements.
- B: We want civil society to be efficient and energetic in support of existing instruments, working to create productive tensions that can spur better work.
- C: We want states, international organisations and civil society to work together under existing instruments with confidence in the norms that they represent and speaking out strongly against transgression of those norms.
- D: We want to promote innovative strategies to engage victims and survivors in relevant treaty discussions and for their voices to continue to shape the international conversation.

Our priorities for the next five years:

What: The reenergisation of certain existing international legal instruments – to make them places of active rethinking on civilian protection

How: We will engage under established instruments and coalitions to present new thinking and innovative ideas. Whilst the subject of those engagements might not be directly purposive in terms of the instrument itself, our aim will be to promote a feeling of shared participation in dynamic thinking towards greater civilian protection in general.

What: Confident and efficient civil society partnerships that set an agenda and continue to challenge states to fulfil obligations

How: We will engage in coalition structures to promote efficiency and a focus on strategic positions that promote dynamic consideration of the issues. We will resist, where necessary, a movement towards formulaic engagements, preferring to keep instruments for civilian protection from becoming too deeply normalised within the international discourse.

What: The continued use of partnerships between states, international organisations and civil society in the context of established legal frameworks

How: We will draw on partners, and use our convening power, to develop collective momentum on key focus issues. We will use this collective engagement on specific issues to promote changes that can strengthen expectations around civilian protection or on

implementation of specific provisions, and to build confidence amongst partners of their capacity to work together.

What: A renewed emphasis on the importance of survivors' voices both to set policy expectations and to challenge established ways of working

How: We will explore how new partnerships and new technologies can engage survivors in international conversations in different ways – working to break down the exclusion that comes from northern focused funding and logistical constraints.

3. We will scrutinise the development of new means and methods of warfare

The development of new weapon technologies and methods of warfare presents an ongoing social challenge. Commercial interests and national-security perceptions drive efforts to develop weapon capabilities based on developments in science and technology, often in secret. Yet the national and multinational mechanisms for interrogating or constraining such processes are very limited.

New technologies may present novel forms or patterns of harm, they may serve to circumvent established legal frameworks by testing definitional boundaries, and they risk exacerbating international political tensions through mistrust and competition. Article 36 will work to promote understanding and consideration of issues associated with specific new technological developments and will maintain a critical perspective on the national and multilateral mechanisms that are charged with managing such developments.

In the period since Article 36 was founded in 2011 far greater emphasis has been given, in international policy discussions, to the role of 'weapon review' processes, as required by article 36 of Additional Protocol I. Anticipation of this growing emphasis was a key consideration in the choice of the name Article 36. As an organisation we remain sceptical of the scope or efficacy of these national level review processes as a mechanism by which the implications of new technologies can be effectively addressed. However, they are important as a recognition that novel weapons, means and methods of warfare do require ongoing scrutiny.

We will work to strengthen that scrutiny, both in terms of the evidential basis and analytical perspectives that inform such scrutiny and by working for a stronger international discourse on how technology can benefit society.

The change we want to see:

- A: We want to see a critical dialogue around the development of new weapon technologies, one that challenges the assumptions and the processes of current practice.
- B: We want to see more substantive evidence made public by states to support their assertions around the effectiveness or safety of new weapon technologies.
- C: We want to see public health and other analytical framings challenging 'legality' as the primary lens through which to view new means and methods of warfare in international discussions.

Our priorities for the next five years:

What: International policy discussions around ‘weapons reviews’ and ‘developments in science and technology’ relevant to weapons provide a contested space – not simply a space for the affirmation of existing practice.

How: We will maintain engagement with policy discussions around new weapon technologies and will continue to raise questions about the assumptions and evidence that underpin those discussions. As this discourse is likely to be given increased attention over the period ahead, we will produce policy analysis and undertake advocacy that continues to ensure humanitarian interests are effectively represented.

What: States make public further information on how they evaluate civilian harm (the forms of harm considered and how they test for those harms) in the analysis of new weapons or related technologies.

How: We will work to raise expectations of an evidence-based consideration of new weapons and related technologies. We will also highlight the types of harms that should be considered in the analysis for weapons, working against efforts to limit consideration only to those harms that are short-term and direct. In particular we will work to build understanding that patterns of harm are significant, in a context where emphasis tends to be placed on the acceptability of systems in narrow hypothetical circumstances.

What: States and other actors assert the relevance of public health and other analytical framings as important to the evaluation of the acceptability of new weapons or technologies.

How: We will bring different modes of analysis into the discussion, in order to identify short-comings of purely legalist framings. Such analysis will place weapons in the wider comparative contexts of health technologies, and global development indicators, and will ask questions as to how the interests of those that may be exposed to harms or risks are represented in the analyses of states.

4. We will work in civil society coalitions and with other stakeholders to build and maintain strong international partnerships for better protection of civilians.

Leading and supporting international civil society coalitions has been central to Article 36’s work since its inception. The organisation was conceived as a having a specialist focus on weapons related law and policy and on the practice of civil society partnerships. Coalitions provide a powerful structure of civil society organisation, strengthening our policy voice and greatly extending our reach. Article 36 is on the leadership bodies of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots and we provide coordination and leadership to the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW). Until 2020 we also served on the Governance Board of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines / Cluster Munition Coalition. In these roles we not only develop and extend our thinking on policy and political strategy but also work to help organisations to collaborate effectively together, drawing on deep experience of coalitions, structure, governance and organisational options.

In addition to these formalised coalitions of civil society partners, Article 36 also works to promote partnerships with states, international organisations and UN agencies. Recent

international legal agreements prohibiting weapons have all built upon such cross-cutting partnerships - and Article 36 has had a leading role in convening such groups to work strategically to achieve these concrete outcomes.

Effective engagement in all of these partnerships requires time dedicated to maintaining the relationships upon which they depend. It requires attention to the logistics of these partnerships as well as to the policy and political questions around which strategy often revolves. As the legal and political landscape changes these partnerships also have to transform – from campaigning for a new treaty to the committed work of making sure such treaties have the desired normative effect.

Article 36 will continue to promote partnerships to achieve new political and legal standards, as well as to make sure existing instruments are functioning as effective tools towards stronger civilian protection. We will build new relationships and networks where we can: working to strengthen partners in the global south where we have the opportunity, and to create bridges to academia and the commercial sector, so as to strengthen the capacity of civil society to effect change.

The change we want to see:

- A: We want to see energetic and dynamic civil society coalitions, that work efficiently and restructure themselves to provide the best mechanisms for developing and promoting humanitarian norms.
- B: We want to see a strong civil society disarmament sector, maintaining shared values of evidence-based analysis and working partnerships, and increasingly recognised as a distinct and important area of international practice.
- C: We want to see an expanded donor base and greater donor engagement with the work of the disarmament sector, or in order to strengthen its critical voice.

Our priorities for the next five years:

What: The overlapping civil society coalitions that work together to promote controls on weapons are structured so as to represent the interests of affected communities, and to provide effective and sustainable structures to continue this work.

How: We will continue to work across multiple civil society coalitions, promoting evidence-based analysis and representation of harms. We will promote planning for the long-term future of such coalitions that adopts structures that create efficiency and sustainability, including the sharing of certain operational functions and the unification of governance bodies where that can provide for longer-term strength.

What: Civil society, states and international organisations continue to work and organise in informal partnerships that build trust and allow for the development of effective political strategies.

How: We will continue our leading role as a convener of multi-stakeholder meetings that build partnerships amongst states, international organisations and civil society. As well as working collaboratively towards specific political outcomes, such meetings will promote open dialogue and ‘ways of working’ that need to be sustained for the longer term effectiveness of the disarmament sector.

What: A wider range of donor organisations fund work in the disarmament sector, and recognise its cross-cutting capacity to promote stronger civilian protection.

How: We will work with others to promote engagement with disarmament amongst a wider range of donors. This will include looking at project concepts and representational tools that seek to provide capacities across the sector rather than on specific weapon-related themes.

5. We will work to establish shared understandings, amongst partners and stakeholders, that can provide the foundations for effective action towards stronger civilian protection in the future.

In the process of working towards new political and legal commitments on certain weapons there are themes of argument and analysis, and ways of working effectively together, that have a significance beyond a particular subject matter. Article 36 is committed to using such experiences to create the building blocks of stronger civilian protection in the future.

From critical engagement with how ‘harm’ to civilians is understood to a recognition that ‘all male panels’ serve to construct gendered privileges in our political discourse, there are intellectual and practical strands that thread through our work and that reappear even as the specific weapon systems under discussion change.

This means promoting women’s expertise across all areas of this work, working against the marginalisation of survivors and their experiences from policy conversations and promoting the voices of lower income countries in diplomatic discussions often dominated by the wealthy. It also means paying attention to how certain modes of argument and analysis systematically exclude certain experiences of harm, or tacitly reaffirm militaristic narratives about how power is ‘really’ constructed in the world.

Whilst working to achieve concrete outcomes on specific issues, Article 36 will continue to be a critical voice on the wider structures by which our society seeks to manage its relationship with weapons and violence. In doing so we will work to identify intellectual and practical changes that will orientate those structures less towards the preservation of weapons, and more strongly towards civilian protection.

The change we want to see:

- A: We want to see strong engagement from the global south on issues of disarmament.
- B: We want women to be leaders in disarmament, recognised as experts in all areas of disarmament work.
- C: We want a disarmament sector that questions underpinning structures of militarism, and the militarisation of technology.

Our priorities for the next five years:

What: Stronger engagement from states in the global south as leaders in the political processes that Article 36 promotes.

How: We will continue to build partnerships with states from the global south, supporting civil society partners where possible and encouraging leadership from diplomats.

We will produce representations of how different political processes promote or discourage engagement by low and middle income countries.

What: Women's expertise and leadership in disarmament promoted and expanded.

How: We will promote continued rejection of all male panels within the disarmament sector and will promote women's participation in events and projects organised by Article 36 and the coalitions of which we are a part. We will undertake critical analysis of the role of gender in analysis and representations of harms and in political engagement with issues.

What: A self-critical disarmament sector that recognises that work to address specific weapons issues can serve to legitimise problematic practices.

How: We will continue to work on weapon related issues that are both broad and narrow, and that consider future developments as well as current practices. For example, addressing the impact of explosive weapons in populated areas keeps a focus on harms from current state practices at the same time that our work on autonomous weapons addresses a specific issue of future concern. We will promote reflection across our sector of the wider political dynamics within which our work occurs, including working to maintain a balance of thematic attention that keeps our sector dynamic and relevant.