Statement by the International Network on Explosive Weapons

United Nations General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

15 October 2026

Delivered by Júlia Codina Sariols, International Network on Explosive Weapons

Thank you, Chair.

I speak on behalf of the International Network on Explosive Weapons, a global network of civil society organisations that calls for strengthened action to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The bombing and shelling of towns and cities remain the leading cause of harm to civilians in armed conflict, killing and injuring tens of thousands each year, with children particularly at risk. The destruction of hospitals, schools, and power and water systems disrupts essential services long after an attack and leads to lasting suffering. Survivors experience life-changing injuries and psychological distress. Explosive weapons also force families from their homes and damage the environment and cultural heritage, deepening the toll on communities for years to come.

This suffering is widespread and severe, and has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. Last year, civilian deaths from explosive weapons remained alarmingly high in Gaza, and increased in Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen and Iran.

The use of explosive weapons in attacks on health care continued to disrupt health services in at least 22 countries and territories, damaging and destroying health facilities and ambulances and killing health workers. In 2025, attacks on humanitarian aid increased by more than half, including in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and attacks on education by almost two thirds.

These devastating impacts on civilians are both foreseeable and preventable.

Nearly four years ago, states adopted the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, the first formal international recognition that this harm must be urgently addressed. Ninety-two states have now endorsed the Declaration, committing to avoid civilian harm by restricting or refraining from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Implementing the Declaration's commitments is a critical humanitarian priority and endorsing states have begun to take initial steps in that direction, but changes to military policy and practice are still limited. In line with the outcome document following the second international conference, endorsing states should review and strengthen national policy and operational practice.

In the Pact for the Future, all UN Member States committed to "restrict or refrain, as appropriate, from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas when their use may be expected to cause harm to civilians or civilian objects".

Chair, the First Committee must address the humanitarian consequences of how these weapons are used.

INEW urges Member States to:

- First, continue to publicly acknowledge and call for action to address the severe direct and indirect harm to individuals and communities from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas,
- Second, endorse the Declaration if they have not yet done so, and implement its commitments, including in the areas of military policy and practice, victim assistance, humanitarian access, and data collection; and
- Third, encourage other states to endorse the Declaration in order to promote its adoption and implementation by the greatest number of states, including by convening or participating in discussions at the regional and sub-regional level.

Endorsing States can also use their diplomatic influence to call on parties to conflict to:

- Stop the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, in recognition of the increased risk of harm when these weapons have wide area effects;
- Facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need;

- Provide, facilitate, or support assistance to victims as well as communities affected by the armed conflict; and
- Facilitate the work of the United Nations, the ICRC and civil society organisations aimed at protecting and assisting civilian populations from the humanitarian impacts of explosive weapon use.

States should also make transfers of explosive weapons, their components and delivery systems conditional on recipients' commitment to use them in a manner consistent with the Declaration, as the Secretary-General has called for. INEW stands ready to support these efforts.

Chair, finally,

We call on States to not accept such suffering as a routine feature of warfare.

Thank you, Chair.