



ICRC

Second international conference of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

San Jose, Costa Rica, 18-20 November 2025

ICRC recommendations

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) welcomes the convening of the second international conference on the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (hereafter, the Declaration), and commends the 88 States that have endorsed it to date.

Three years since its adoption in 2022, the Declaration remains a relatively new instrument. However, it has already played a valuable role in stimulating dialogue among States and the sharing of good practices aimed at reducing civilian harm resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA). The process has generated significant momentum and expectations for meaningful changes in military policy and practice. National, regional, and international meetings held in the lead-up to and between conferences have kept the issue on the agenda and expanded awareness across key actors, including within governments – with the involvement of ministries of foreign affairs and defence (from legal advisers to targeting experts and explosive ordnance disposal specialists). The inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach - with the United Nations, the ICRC, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, and civil society organizations - has enriched the discussions and fostered the exchange of research, lessons learned, and practical recommendations. Encouragingly, several States have begun internal reflections and taken steps to align national policies and practices with the Declaration's commitments.

Yet, in the three years since the Declaration's adoption, the use of heavy explosive weapons in cities continues to cause unacceptable civilian harm – death, injury, lifelong disability and severe psychological trauma – on a shockingly large and ever-increasing scale throughout the world. The suffering of civilians is exacerbated when basic services on which they rely for their survival – such as water, health care, electricity, or waste management – are disrupted, often also due to the use of heavy explosive weapons. Those who manage to leave have to endure the dangers and hardships of displacement, often for years. Many others are unable to get away because escape routes are blocked, bombed or contaminated by unexploded ordnance that will continue to maim and kill for decades to come. The increasing civilian harm underscores the continuing relevance of the Declaration, but also the urgency of translating its commitments into concrete changes on the ground to deliver on its promises. National- and international-level efforts to implement the Declaration's ambition and potential must be significantly accelerated.

Experience over the past three years has also clarified key challenges to implementation. In some cases, States have yet to determine at domestic level where institutional responsibility for the Declaration lies or have not allocated dedicated personnel and resources to support its implementation. As a result, national ownership in those States has remained limited and progress slow. Some States have also expressed uncertainty about how or where to begin. It has become clear that approaches to implementation will necessarily vary across contexts.

Against this backdrop, the second international conference offers a timely opportunity to take stock of progress, address challenges and share practical experiences. To maintain momentum and meet the urgent need to enhance the protection of civilians and civilian objects, the ICRC encourages all States attending the Costa Rica conference to take the following tangible steps before, during, and after the event:

1. Establish the foundations for national implementation

- 1.1 Translate the Declaration into national languages to ensure wider dissemination and integration into domestic frameworks,
- 1.2 Designate a national focal point - or several, as appropriate - with a mandate to coordinate across relevant ministries and agencies, including the Ministry of Defence,
- 1.3 Allocate adequate human and financial resources to support the implementation process,
- 1.4 Integrate the Declaration into the work of national committees on international humanitarian law (IHL) or equivalent inter-agency coordination bodies,
- 1.5 Actively disseminate the Declaration within armed forces and defence institutions.

2. Contribute to the development of tools, methodologies, and good practices to support implementation

- 2.1 Share detailed information on national tools, procedures, and methodologies used to implement the Declaration. In addition to showcasing individual efforts, this will support other States seeking concrete examples, contribute to the UNODA database and help build a menu of adaptable approaches,
- 2.2 Ensure that shared materials contain sufficient detail to be practically useful. While certain content may be sensitive, many materials can be shared in their current form or through declassified formats. Technical exchanges are essential - summaries or general overviews are not sufficient to support others meaningfully. Resources should be allocated to enable this contribution,
- 2.3 Encourage and institutionalize the collection of good policies and practices by armed forces and other relevant authorities concerning civilian protection during armed conflicts involving the use of explosive weapons in populated areas,
- 2.4 Proactively share these good policies and practices, to promote transparency and enable peer learning,
- 2.5 Clearly identify and share areas where support is needed and specify the types of guidance or tools that would be most helpful. This will assist stakeholders in tailoring future efforts, including workshops, research, and technical assistance.

3. Undertake a comprehensive review of national policy and practice

- 3.1 Launch a structured and thorough national review of relevant policies and practices related to the protection of civilians during hostilities involving the use

- of explosive weapons in populated areas, and to the implementation of commitments under the Declaration,
- 3.2 Consider structuring the review according to a consistent framework, such as the Declaration's commitments in Sections 3 and 4, and using the following guiding questions:
- What are the existing national policies in relation to this specific commitment, and what gaps may exist?
 - What are the existing national practices in relation to this specific commitment, and what are the areas for improvement?
 - What forms of support might be required—or could be offered to others—to strengthen implementation in this area?
- 3.3 On the basis of the review, develop a national implementation plan with a clear timeline, tailored to national capacities, resources, and priorities,
- 3.4 Prioritize as relevant measures related to the implementation of the commitments to restrict or refrain as appropriate from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and to take into account the direct and indirect effects on civilians and civilian objects (paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of the Declaration¹),
- 3.5 Share the findings of the review and provide updates on the measures taken or planned to enhance policy and practice—at the next conference or other relevant fora.

4. Promote universalization and effective implementation of the Declaration

- 4.1 Participate actively in the Costa Rica conference and allocate resources to organize or engage meaningfully in “intersessional” meetings throughout 2026,
- 4.2 Use relevant multilateral, regional, and international forums to promote the Declaration and encourage both its endorsement and effective implementation by the greatest possible number of States, particularly those currently involved in armed conflicts,
- 4.3 Publicly express concern about the devastating humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and call upon and support all States engaged in armed conflict to strengthen the protection of civilians — including by restricting or refraining as appropriate from the use of explosive weapons when such use may be expected to cause civilian harm or damage to civilian objects,
- 4.4 Include adherence to the Declaration's commitments in existing or future dialogue with non-state armed groups,
- 4.5 For States that have not yet endorsed the Declaration, do so without delay, and begin implementation efforts without waiting for formal endorsement.

¹ The ICRC's publications “*Explosive Weapons with Wide Area Effect: A Deadly Choice in Populated Areas*” (2022) and “*Preventing and mitigating the indirect effects on essential services from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas: ICRC Recommendations*” (2024) provide recommendations on how to implement these commitments.