



Thank you Madame Chair.

Distinguish delegates, dear colleagues.

Handicap International brings humanitarian assistance in countries affected by conflicts or natural disasters, and work with refugees and host communities, bringing immediate and longer term support. Working with refugees is part of HI's DNA, as the organisation was founded in 1982 to provide Cambodian refugee survivors with prosthetic limbs and rehabilitation - a task the organization is still carrying out today worldwide.

Over the few last years, Handicap International has been engaged in documenting the impact of explosive weapons in populated areas, mainly through our operations. Let me give you a very brief introduction on the impact of these weapons.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is a **major humanitarian problem which causes a distinct pattern of harm**: at the moment of the use, the blast and/or a fragmentation of an explosive weapon **kills civilians living in conflicts**. On the long term, explosive weapons also cause **physical disability**. On the other side, difficult living conditions followed by continues bombing and shelling are causing **psychological suffering and trauma**. Generations of Syrian, Yemenis, Iraqi, and many other children and youth are growing up surrounded by bombing and shelling. These generations of young people will be marked by the consequences of continuous bombing and shelling their whole lives.

In addition to severe effects in countries affected by armed-violence, the widespread use of explosive weapons in populated areas **is a leading cause of forced displacement, driving hundreds of thousands of people to seek protection abroad**. I am quite sure that, as we sit in this room, there is at least one family that is making the heart-breaking decision to finally pack up and leave their home, or what is left of their home, no longer able to bear living under the threat of bombing and shelling, not having access to basic needs and essential services.

A decision to flee is in most cases the result of a wide range of **interrelated factors** (often with complex political, social and economic roots), and mitigating some or all of these factors is a challenging theoretical task.

What I am presenting today comes from our intervention in Syria. In 2016, we published a report titled **Qasef: Escaping the bombing**, and based on the interviews with Syrian refugees carried out in Jordan there was a clear illustration of the impact of bombing and shelling on forced displacement. And that clear illustration engaged us in continuing this research. Year after, last month, we launched a second report called: **Everywhere the bombing followed us** which complemented previous findings with deeper insight on how Syrian refugees have

been driven out of their homes due to the use of explosive weapons, and were compelled to escape multiple times until they reached a safer place. Specifically the study shows how women, persons with disabilities and injuries are mostly impacted by this multiple displacement pattern in terms of social and psychological consequences.

The main findings of this report shows that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas drives multiple forced displacements.

1/ half of the respondents had been displaced within their own city prior seeking eternal refuge in Lebanon (some of them up to 10 times)

2/ more than half of all respondents had been displaced between 1 -3 different cities in Syria before seeking external refuge in Lebanon.

While documenting the impact of explosive weapons in populated areas, we have acknowledged that there is a difference between what drives families or individuals to flee their homes, and what triggers that decision. From the statements of Syrian refugees, continuous bombing and shelling can be both, a direct trigger and a slower working driver of forced displacement.

That being said, living in a close proximity to bombing and shelling can be a primary factor that forces people to flee their homes. Waiting for oneself or loved ones to be killed, injured or berried with rubble is terrifying and traumatizing experience. A house destroyed as a result of bombing, damage to sanitation facilities, disruption of electricity supply and destruction of essential services can reasonably lead to a consideration that fleeing is most necessary or prudent.

44% of respondents in our research had their homes destroyed due to the use of explosive weapons.

Sarah, 35 said that the family house was destroyed. They lost everything and didn't have time to get ready. Sarah has spent next two years on the road, forced to be displaced many times before reaching Lebanon. She was injured when the house was bombed suffering from open wounds on her leg. First night she walked barefoot for 8 hours, because she did not have time to even take shoes...

In addition to creating fear and insecurity, extensive use of explosive weapons can cause severe damage to critical infrastructure and thereby limit or deny the local population access to essential services, most important to medical facilities and sometimes vital treatment.

36% of respondents directly linked the use of EW to the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Particularly the destruction of the health services has tremendous consequences on civilians, women notably due to the lack of reproductive health services.

Ranim, 31: She gave birth to her baby at home, at a home she was displaced for second time. After one month she had to flee again. But many other women were not so lucky, and as Ranim said, they died giving birth, because there were no hospitals to take them.

At the end, I want to say that we cannot be insincere and say that wars or conflicts are making people flee. That is why this discussion today is very important, to distinguish between different drivers of forced displacement, but also to distinguish between different conflicts modalities when seeking to respond to protracted situations of forced displacement. In short, armed conflict puts people at risk of displacement, but some aspects of armed conflict are more likely to lead to displacement than others.

Recommendations:

As the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has been identified as a key driver of population displacement, we believe that stopping the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is not only essential to provide greater protection to civilians living in armed conflict, but also to reduce the increase of displaced people caused by conflict.

International community should **strongly condemn the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and endorse the UN Secretary-General's recommendation that states should avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas.**

All states, especially those participating or contributing to the military operations today, all parties to the conflict, **should most urgently review their national policies and practices,** and make changes that will strengthen the protection of civilians.

States should support the development of an **international political instrument to reduce harm from the use of explosive weapons** by stopping the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas, and by providing a framework for assistance to victims including affected communities.

Thank you.

Alma Taslidžan Al-Osta