Seventh Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

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General exchange of views

Working paper submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights*

1. We reaffirm the critical importance of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its five Protocols as a fundamental cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). In its preamble, the Convention establishes the essential principle of protecting civilians from the effects of hostilities, anchored by the core international legal tenet that the right of parties to an armed conflict to choose methods or means of warfare is not unlimited.

2. Consequently, it strictly prohibits or restricts the employment of weapons, projectiles, and methods of warfare deemed to be excessively injurious, cause unnecessary suffering, or have indiscriminate effects. Today, however, these foundational principles face a severe test and are placed under immense strain by contemporary battlefield realities, the continuous evolution of military capabilities, and the rapid deployment of advanced weaponry.

3. In this regard, it is critical to recognize the direct link between the wide-area effects of explosive weapons and the heightened risks of civilian harm. There is an urgent need to highlight the indirect, or reverberating, effects of these weapons, acknowledging that damage to critical infrastructure inevitably disrupts essential services, ultimately impacting a broad segment of the civilian population.

4. When examining the reality in the Horn of Africa, the human cost is devastating. In Ethiopia, a stark manifestation of these risks is evident in densely populated urban centers, where the government has routinely and indiscriminately bombarded cities and towns since September 2026. This reliance on an arsenal of heavy explosive weapons—such as missiles, artillery, mortars, and air-dropped bombs—within residential environments constitutes a direct violation of the principle of prohibition against indiscriminate attacks. Furthermore, it completely contradicts the commitments enshrined in the 2022 Dublin Political Declaration on EWIPA. These weapons, originally designed for open warfare and expansive battlefields, inherently lack the precision necessary to safeguard civilian objects within urban areas.

5. Similarly, in Sudan, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continue to blast civilian areas with explosive weapons, completely ignoring the fundamental rules of distinction and proportionality. International bodies have extensively documented the manifestations of these violations, which include indiscriminate artillery and mortar shelling targeting crowded neighborhoods in Khartoum, Omdurman, El Fasher, and other cities. This systematic targeting of civilian facilities has severely impacted hospitals, markets, water stations, and power grids, knocking many out of service and compounding the humanitarian catastrophe. Moreover, the intensive bombardment has left vast amounts of unexploded ordnance (UXO) inside residential quarters and homes, posing a continuous, long-term threat to civilians attempting to return, leading to mass displacement and a collapsed healthcare system.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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6. Compounding these regional crises is the deployment of specialized munitions in other conflict theaters, such as the Israeli military's use of weapons like white phosphorus in Gaza, which cause horrific burns and extreme suffering. While Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) is intended to curb such cruelty, it suffers from two major loopholes that undermine its protective mandate: first, it excludes multi-purpose weapons, failing to cover white phosphorus because it is not "primarily designed" to cause burn injuries; second, it treats ground-launched weapons differently, enforcing far less stringent regulations on munitions fired from the ground compared to those dropped from aircraft.

7. In this context, we must condemn in the strongest terms the treacherous attacks launched by the Israeli occupation forces, which utilized explosive devices disguised as communication equipment and detonated them remotely inside Lebanon. These actions constitute a dangerous precedent in the history of warfare and are strictly prohibited under Article 7 of the Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Rather than being merely random acts of violence, these operations represent flagrant violations of international humanitarian law that directly threaten human security and severely undermine the future stability of the entire region.

8. Furthermore, this systematic reliance on deceptive warfare sets a catastrophic benchmark that erodes the foundational principles of international law, particularly the obligation to protect civilians from untargetable hazards. Masking lethal explosives within everyday communication infrastructure strips civilian spaces of safety and intentionally blurs the line between combatants and non-combatants. Such methods not only cause immediate, widespread terror but also institutionalize a lawless approach to asymmetric conflict that poses an existential threat to global security frameworks and the international legal order.

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights calls upon all States Parties to:

(a) Ensure strict international oversight and compliance frameworks against the indiscriminate and disproportionate deployment of explosive weapons with wide-area effects (EWIPA) in populated areas. This includes restricting the routine use of heavy aerial and artillery bombardment in cities and towns in Ethiopia, and curbing the systematic utilization of these weapon systems within crowded neighborhoods and critical infrastructure in Sudan. Focus must be placed on upholding the technical and operational commitments of the 2022 Dublin Political Declaration, strengthening weapons tracking, and reinforcing global disarmament standards to prevent the devastating humanitarian impact of these munitions in urban environments;

(b) Close the legal loopholes within Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) by amending its texts to comprehensively prohibit the use of incendiary weapons and specialized munitions, such as white phosphorus, without exception, and eliminating the regulatory distinction between air-dropped and ground-launched weapons to ensure robust, non-discriminatory civilian protection from catastrophic burns and unnecessary suffering;

(c) Strictly criminalize methods of treacherous and deceptive warfare involving the weaponization and remote detonation of everyday civilian communication infrastructure and equipment, strongly condemning these actions as a dangerous precedent that violates Article 7 of the Amended Protocol II to the CCW, deliberately blurs the line between combatants and non-combatants, and erodes global human security frameworks;

(d) Strengthen international collaboration to accelerate ERW clearance, focusing on the rapid removal of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and explosive remnants of war from residential quarters in Sudan, the Horn of Africa, and other conflict theaters, to secure safe and sustainable environments for civilian return, recovery, and the rehabilitation of collapsed essential services and healthcare systems.