

**Statement of the United States
Ambassador Claire D. Cronin**
**Adoption Ceremony for the Political Declaration on Strengthening the
Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from
the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas**

*November 18, 2022
Dublin, Ireland*

The United States is proud to endorse the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. We believe this Declaration will help States improve the protection of civilians and reduce human suffering in armed conflict. Protecting civilians from harm in connection with military operations is not only a moral imperative; it is also critical to achieving long-term success on the battlefield.

The urgency of this issue cannot be overstated. Russia's devastating strikes have hit cities across Ukraine, with shells damaging or destroying residential areas, medical facilities, and critical energy infrastructure as winter fast approaches. In Syria, the United Nations estimates that over 300,000 civilians have been killed since 2011 due to the conflict, with the actual death toll likely far higher. The United States is proud to join the States endorsing this Declaration in committing to seek to reduce harm to civilians through improving our implementation of international humanitarian law to achieve a better future for humankind.

The United States would like to express our profound appreciation for Foreign Minister Coveney, Ambassador Gaffey, and the rest of the team from Ireland for their dedication towards making this Political Declaration a reality. Ireland's sustained and skillful diplomacy resulted in a Declaration that brings together a wide range of views on this critical issue. Although this Declaration will be implemented by States, the contributions of civil society organizations and international organizations greatly enhanced the negotiations and resulting text, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration.

Our collective work on this Declaration does not end today. Endorsement is just an initial step. We must now turn our efforts to implementation. To have a lasting impact, this Declaration will need robust implementation by each State and active follow-on exchanges among States. We want to see militaries from around the world learning from each other and sharing practical measures to strengthen their implementation of international humanitarian law and improve the protection of

civilians. The United States regularly collaborates with allies and partners on efforts to mitigate and respond to civilian harm, and we look forward to strengthening those relationships as part of our implementation of this Declaration.

Although the commitments set forth in this Declaration are already reflected in existing U.S. military policy and practice, the U.S. military continually strives to improve its policies and practices in this area. On August 25, Secretary of Defense Austin issued the U.S. Department of Defense's Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan, which sets forth 11 objectives and specific actions to advance those objectives over the next four years. These efforts include the establishment of a new Civilian Protection Center of Excellence, dedicated civilian harm mitigation and response personnel throughout the Department, and a data management platform for data related to civilian harm. We look forward to sharing more information on this Plan with you this afternoon.

In closing, thank you again to Ireland for facilitating our work and to all the delegations that are here to support this Declaration. We look forward to a productive session today, and to working with you all going forward to strengthen our collective efforts to reduce human suffering in armed conflict.