

Convention on Cluster Munitions

Statement of Australia

Mr President

As this is the first time we have taken the floor, Australia wishes to thank Nicaragua for its leadership, dedication and commitment as President to the universalisation and implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Australia also congratulates Namibia on its recent ratification of the Convention and Sri Lanka on acceding to the Convention in March 2018, and welcomes its nomination for the Presidency of the 9th Meeting of States Parties.

Australia would like to take this opportunity to make some general observations as well as specific comments on international cooperation and assistance, and victim assistance.

Australia notes with concern that cluster munitions continue to be used in current conflicts, resulting in new contamination in Syria and Yemen. This is particularly concerning given the disproportionate effect these weapons have on civilian populations. The Cluster Munitions Monitor estimates that 99 percent of casualties in 2017 were civilians. We call on all states not currently party to the Convention to accede to the Convention.

Australia remains a strong supporter of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and we provide international cooperation and assistance in support of implementation of the Convention in a range of different ways.

Our approach is three-fold:

1. We provide support to the operation of the convention through our participation as a Coordinator on International Cooperation and Assistance and through financial support to the ISU and the sponsorship programme. We are also active members of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG) and our Ambassador to Geneva, Ms Sally Mansfield is a member of the Bureau of the Council of Foundation of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (the GICHD).
2. We provide funding for clearance and victim assistance to individual countries, including in the reporting period to Afghanistan, Cambodia and Iraq.
3. And we provide support to global activities through contributions to organisations such as the GICHD, the United Nations Mine Action Service, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Humanity and Inclusion (previously called Handicap International) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines – Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC).

Australia does not distinguish between cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war and anti-personnel landmines, grouping this work together under the title “mine action”. In 2017 Australia contributed over AUD5 million to mine action.

We encourage all states parties with clearance obligations under the Convention to work assiduously to meet these commitments and we encourage those states with the ability to do so provide assistance to affected states.

Australia has been honoured to serve as Coordinator on International Cooperation and Assistance, currently with Peru and previously with Iraq. We have focused on finding new ways to bring together donors and affected states, to give states parties the opportunity to better understand each other’s needs and requirements.

During our time as Coordinator we have been particularly pleased to see progress on implementation of the “country coalitions” concept developed by Germany as the President of the Seventh Meeting of States Parties. This valuable initiative is already proving to be an effective mechanism for helping affected states to gather donors and implementing partners around them to assist them in completion of their obligations under the Convention. We are pleased to be hosting, together with Peru and the Lebanon Mine Action Centre, a side-event tomorrow lunchtime which will showcase one example of a “country coalition”, the Lebanon Mine Action Forum. We encourage you all to attend.

It is clear that in order for states parties to meet their obligations under the Convention, greater cooperation between affected states and donor states is necessary. As we come to the end of our tenure as a Coordinator, we encourage affected and donor states to use their Article 7 reports, the support of the Coordinators, and other mechanisms established by the Convention, as well as new tools such as “country coalitions”, to facilitate progress on implementation of Convention obligations.

As a state party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, as well as the Convention on Cluster Munitions, Australia observes that there is a significant overlap in the commitments under all three conventions regarding the provision of assistance to victims. This has been forefront in our activities to promote an integrated approach to victim assistance. Australia encourages all states to consider integrating victim assistance into broader health and disability policies, whilst at the same time ensuring that the specific needs of victims continue to be met. thereby ensuring that the support required by victims is provided for their lifetime.

Thank you Mr President.