



SOUTHEAST ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

18-19 March 2025 | Manila, Philippines

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

Introduction

Aimed at contributing in addressing the humanitarian, developmental, and security challenges posed by cluster munitions in the Asia-Pacific region and to catalyze regional action towards the universalization of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), the “Southeast Asia and Pacific Regional Workshop on the Convention on Cluster Munitions” convened in Manila on 18-19 March 2025, gathering forty-eight (48) representatives from 21 Southeast Asian and Pacific Island States not parties to the CCM, as well as from States Parties and civil society stakeholders.

Universalization efforts do not take place in a vacuum. Recent developments have demonstrated that overall humanitarian disarmament efforts and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) more generally are faced with unprecedented challenges. The CCM is not exempted from this shift in attitudes, with the first ever case of withdrawal of a State from a multilateral treaty prohibiting a whole class of weapons entering into force on 6 March.

Whilst the President of the 13th Meeting of the States Parties (MSP) to the CCM deeply regretted “this unprecedented withdrawal decision that although allowed by the Convention and is a sovereign prerogative, risks eroding the norms and principles that prohibit the use of cluster munitions,” he also underscored the sense of optimism around ongoing and planned action in the Asia-Pacific region.

Both States parties and States not parties to the CCM were encouraged by Vanuatu who informed of the recent Parliament approval of an accession bill to the CCM as well as to the Arms Trade Treaty and the plans to formally submit letters of accession to the depositary of the treaties. The Marshall Islands, furthermore, informed of their accession to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and has supported the goal of prohibiting cluster munitions, but has not yet taken any steps to join the CCM. Other Southeast Asia and Pacific States that have previously spoken in support of the CCM, paying close attention to their advancements, included Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Timor Leste, seeing no obvious obstacle to joining the Convention.

Encouraged by such steps, the group recalled the recent UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution on the CCM that enjoyed broad support well beyond the group of current States parties, urging “*all States not parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions to ratify or accede to it as soon as possible, and all States parties to promote adherence to the Convention through bilateral, subregional and multilateral contacts*”. Participating Southeast Asia and Pacific States therefore vowed to pursue more resolute universalization efforts ahead with the view to change the course of recent developments ahead of the upcoming 13th MSP and Third Review Conference (2026).

Through different sessions and with a constructive spirit and engaging interactions of participants, the workshop discussed both the background and genesis of the Convention in that, over the last 80 years, cluster munitions have caused the deaths and injuries of thousands of civilians. Building on the APMBC, the CCM represents a groundbreaking, legally binding international treaty aimed at eliminating the civilian harm caused by cluster munitions through the comprehensive prohibition of their use, production, stockpiling, and transfer. Proven incompatible with IHL, both at the time of use and long after conflicts have ended, the Convention successfully banned a whole class of weapons in 2008.

Discussions also touched upon more recent developments, seeing the CCM as well as the APMBC facing headwinds and a risk of norms prohibiting indiscriminate weapon use being eroded, with some States stating increased security concerns as rational for reviewing their commitments to humanitarian disarmament instruments underpinned by IHL. Also, the changing nature of warfare, with battles increasingly fought in densely populated urban areas, effectively challenges the principles of distinction and

proportionality, risking them becoming subordinate to more immediate security concerns and military objectives.

The current global security environment therefore behooves the States Parties of the Convention, and the wider community dedicated to the advancement of the humanitarian disarmament agenda, to take stock of how these elements and circumstances impact the upholding of the humanitarian principles and norms underpinned in the CCM.

Given these challenges, IHL must remain a cornerstone for shaping the morality of conflict and regulating the use of military technologies. The indiscriminate use of weapons like cluster munitions not only results in long-term harm by leaving a legacy of violence, trauma, and permanent disabilities for countless civilians, but it also deeply fractures communities, making peace and reconciliation in post-war societies far more difficult to achieve. These enduring consequences highlight the urgent need to preserve and strengthen the protective norms established by humanitarian disarmament treaties like the CCM.

The importance of upholding and strengthening these established norms, as well as preserving the effectiveness of existing humanitarian disarmament treaties, is a shared responsibility for all states committed to safeguarding civilians in armed conflicts.

Participants reaffirmed that its core, the CCM is a humanitarian treaty aimed at reducing civilian suffering from cluster munitions, preventatively, by prohibiting future use and, in reparation, by clearing cluster munitions remnants in communities already affected and by providing assistance and support to the victims of cluster munitions, ensuring their economic and social inclusion. Article 5 of the CCM is central to its identity as a humanitarian disarmament treaty.

Promoting and protecting these comprehensive prohibitions is not just a moral imperative but also an obligation. Article 21 of the CCM clearly outlines this duty, requiring States Parties to actively promote the treaty's norms and to make every effort to discourage non-party states from using cluster munitions.

Achieving universal adherence to these norms is critical to the success of the CCM. While regions like Europe, despite recent setbacks, Africa, and the Americas have the highest rates of ratification and accession, progress remains limited in Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific. The responsibility to promote universalization falls on all States Parties, and their collective action is crucial to ensuring that the Convention fulfills its mission of preventing further civilian harm and fostering global peace and security.

Against this backdrop, the Philippines has been actively supporting the universalization of the CCM and the upholding of norms of the humanitarian disarmament treaties and of IHL. Universalization is one of the key priorities of the Philippines in its Presidency of the 13th MSP to the CCM, along with strengthening national capacities and victim assistance. The Workshop is a flagship initiative of the Philippine Presidency and a manifestation of the Philippines' commitment to the implementation of its obligations as a State Party to the CCM.

I. Overview of discussions

The Workshop was divided into different sessions where various speakers delved into the different aspects of the CCM and the humanitarian disarmament agenda. The resource speakers raised the following key points during their presentations:

- Cluster munitions are described as “a weapon that keeps on killing” due to the long-term harm that they cause, even after armed conflicts have ended. Aside from the physical harm, the impact of cluster munitions can cause long-term psychological trauma and impact the socio-economic conditions of an affected state.
- Southeast Asia has played a pivotal role in the global movement to address the use and consequences of cluster munitions, in which some countries in the region experienced the negative humanitarian impacts of cluster munitions firsthand.
- The CCM, which enables the achievement of broader goals, including post-conflict development and growth, offers a pathway for healing and progress. The development and recovery in affected states such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Lao PDR are testament to the CCM's capacity to create opportunities for development, peace, and security in affected communities.
- Given today's challenging global security environment as well as the impact of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) on security, the universalization of the CCM would strengthen the entire international law, humanitarian law, and human rights law framework. Two key aspects of universalization should be borne in mind: 1) preventing States Parties from leaving the Convention (implementation of the norms); and 2) encouraging more states to join the CCM.

- Smaller states can influence multilateral policymaking, and thus can contribute to the universalization of the CCM and the upholding of its norms and principles of humanitarian disarmament. States are encouraged to strengthen regional solidarity and ensure that humanitarian concerns—such as human dignity, gender equality, and climate justice—are interwoven with disarmament efforts.
- A participant posed a question to the Chair regarding the reason behind Lithuania's withdrawal from the CCM, to which the Chair responded that Lithuania stated domestic security concerns as reasons for its withdrawal. The Chair also pointed out that one of the great ironies of IHL is that it takes states to witness devastation before they actually sit down into establishing a convention to prevent the devastation.
- On the status of the ratification of the CCM, out of 111 States Parties and 12 signatories, only 8 States Parties and 1 signatory are from Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Despite the region being heavily contaminated by cluster munitions, accession and overall participation remain low.
- The CCM's provisions on victim assistance are the Convention's approach to address the devastating social, economic, physical, and psychological impacts of cluster munitions. The CCM, compared to the APMBC, redefines victim support by shifting from socio-economic reintegration (as seen in the Mine Ban Convention) to socio-economic inclusion, prompting reflections on structural barriers that exclude victims and how governments can address these issues.
- In the implementation of the CCM and its key articles, there are key questions that should be considered:
 - Does existing national legislation cover the needs for domestic penal sanctions with regard to the CCM, or should specific legislation be introduced?
 - In terms of accountability, how should we operationalize accountability in cases of violation of the norm? Are individuals and corporations liable if they engage in prohibited acts?
 - Is there a need to amend or adjust new military directives? Military doctrines? Training? Rules of engagement?
 - In the implementation of victim assistance provisions, where would the resources come from?
- There are international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), that offer technical support to states in relation to models of national legislation to implement the CCM.

- Non-affected states also have a role in championing humanitarian disarmament. For instance, New Zealand, a State Party to the CCM and a non-affected state, supports humanitarian demining to agencies such as the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC).
- Inter-ministry cooperation and allocation of resources are important in accomplishing reporting obligations in the Convention, as well as in the completion of stockpile destruction.
- Despite the progress in banning cluster munitions, concerns about their continued use and increasing casualties—particularly in Ukraine, Myanmar, and Syria—as well as the renewed production, transfer, and transit of these weapons, were raised during the panel discussion. It was emphasized that cluster munitions and landmines are never legitimate means of warfare.
- In terms of addressing the broader challenges facing IHL and other disarmament conventions, reinforcing the connection between peace, security, and development is essential, as well as avoiding the false dichotomy between security and humanitarian principles and considerations.
- It was stressed that, amidst the increasing number of armed conflicts, states should recall that although elaborated and established in peacetime, the IHL framework underpinning humanitarian disarmament treaties apply *during* conflict as a means to protect civilians and can therefore not be disregarded in times of war. The importance of maintaining legal frameworks that have been hard-won through international efforts was also underscored.

II. Challenges to ratification and implementation of the CCM

Participants inquired about what they perceived were the challenges in implementing CCM obligations, especially on reporting and representation during meetings, such as the intersessional meetings of the CCM. The resource speakers were also asked how international cooperation and assistance played a role in the clearance, stockpile destruction, and victim assistance in their communities.

In responses by the resource speakers, it was shared that reporting fulfilled specific objectives, is a legal obligation, confidence building and, as its name states, a transparency measure. It was also noted that the CCM had a simplified reporting form which, once the initial report was submitted, would only require confirmation that the situation for that State Party remained unchanged. Inter-ministry cooperation was also mentioned as vital to ensure transparent reporting. However, the need to coordinate with multiple ministries and lack of expertise in reporting can also delay submission of national

reports. Moreover, international cooperation and assistance, especially donor funding, played a major role in the implementation and sustainability of mine clearance activities in affected State Parties.

It was also discussed that reporting is important for donors as well as for building trust and confidence among States Parties to the Convention. In terms of building capacity for national reporting, the ISU is ready to offer support to any State Party in need.

III. Ways Forward

Some participants shared positive developments and views with regard to the status of their governments' ratification of the CCM and their states' aspiration to be a state party to the CCM. Many participants also affirmed their states' support to the principles and norms of the CCM, as well as those of the other humanitarian disarmament treaties such as the APMBC, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Some delegations also underscored their consistent support of the annual UNGA resolution on the CCM.

Some participants also raised the need for international support, regional cooperation, stronger advocacy, and continuous dialogue, and streamlined administrative requirements and procedures to encourage smaller states to become part of the CCM.

The CCM can draw lessons from the APMBC in terms of regional leadership and dialogue, international support, humanitarian benefits, and the increasing recognition of the APMBC's alignment with broader developmental and peace-building goals.

By drawing upon the experiences of other regions that have successfully advanced adherence to humanitarian disarmament treaties, and by sharing experiences with each other, Southeast Asia and the Pacific can push and sustain a collective momentum for CCM ratification.

Looking toward the next steps, three points were raised: 1) There is a need to go back to the basics, recall the evidence base that displayed the challenge and incompatibility of cluster munitions use within the parameters of IHL and hence the reason for why these norms were established; 2) Supportive and constructive approaches should be promoted; no naming or shaming of States that have yet to adhere to humanitarian disarmament treaties; and, 3) States need to counter harmful narratives and false dichotomy between State security being at odds with participation in key humanitarian disarmament treaties.



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At the conclusion of the Workshop, the Chair expressed his gratitude to the participants, the resource speakers, and the facilitators. He also underscored his gratitude to the states that have given the Presidency of the 13th MSP to the CCM the encouragement to advance its work through the information shared on the positive developments in the ratification process of the CCM.

The Chair expressed his hope that the Workshop has helped foster a network of advocates; strengthened the participants' appreciation of humanitarian norms and principles in the context of disarmament; and has provided a platform to openly share any concern or views on the topics discussed.
