



**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Apostolic Nuncio,
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International
Organizations in Geneva at the 10th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on
Cluster Munitions – General Exchange of Views**
Geneva, 30 August 2022

Mr. President,

The Holy See appreciates the commitment of the United Kingdom to the Convention on Cluster Munitions and wishes to thank you for the work carried out in preparation of this Tenth Meeting of States Parties.

Legal instruments such as this very Convention are not empty legal frameworks. They represent an ethical challenge and opportunity for all those who are seeking to safeguard, build peace, and, in particular, defend the weakest and the many innocents suffering from the cruelty of conflicts.

By placing the human person at the center, the Convention on Cluster Munitions is a living instrument and evidence of the inextricable link between disarmament and development. It is for this precise reason that it is outrageous that, as we are holding this meeting, cluster munitions continue to be produced, stockpiled, and used in conflicts, inevitably giving rise to more victims and land contamination.

Mr. President,

It is a legitimate question for this Meeting to ask: what can we, as States Parties, do to protect the most precious gift – that is, human life – and what can we concretely do to prevent further victims? From the perspective of the Delegation of the Holy See, a renewed sentiment of urgency should impel the international community as a whole. It is of paramount importance that the obligations contracted are not placed on hold. Let us keep in mind that delays in the implementation of the Convention are inevitably measured in terms of human lives or delayed assistance to victims.

In this regard, it is worth remembering that the universalization of the Convention is not an optional component. It is a legal obligation. Universalization has direct implications and far-reaching consequences on the operations and on the effective implementation of the Convention, in particular with relation to victims' assistance.

Mr. President,

As one of the first States to ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Holy See remains fully committed to its implementation and has continued to encourage other State Parties and non-Parties to reaffirm the preeminent and inherent value of human dignity and the centrality of the human person.

In renewing its strong support to the Convention, the Holy See wishes to express its gratitude to other States Parties for their commitment and generosity – in particular in assisting victims of cluster munitions through international cooperation and assistance. However, the Holy See is concerned by the attempts to introduce certain expressions in the work of the Convention and in the work of the coordinators, as is the case of the proposed terms of reference of the so-called “Gender focal points”.

The Holy See is concerned that the introduction of new terminology which, is ambiguous and not clearly defined, would shift the attention and efforts away from the obligations of the Convention toward political and ideological issues which do not pertain to the work of the Convention. As we

have seen in several other fora, not only do certain expressions not enjoy consensus, but they might also place ulterior barriers in the way of our common efforts to seek universal adherence to the Convention.

For these reasons, the Holy See warns against using the framework of the Convention to push certain agendas and retains the right to dissociate itself from the work of the above-mentioned focal points should their mandate extend beyond the ordinary, generally accepted usage and meaning of the word “gender”, based on the biological identity that is male and female. The Holy See does not accept any other interpretation, adaptation, or connotation, different from this accepted prior usage¹.

Mr. President,

The Holy See wishes to seize the occasion of this Meeting of States Parties to make a strong appeal to States which are not yet party to this Convention, to adhere to it and readily implement the Convention in its letter and spirit. Let us earnestly place girls, boys, women and men, at the center of our efforts for disarmament. Let us also promote a holistic and integrated approach in victims’ assistance, that is firmly centered on human dignity and towards integral development. Finally, let us also ask, what is the meaning of peace, security and stability, if our societies, our communities and our families live in constant fear?

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ Cf. Holy See’s Final Statement at the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.