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Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Sabaidee and Hello. My name is Siliphone Phommachanthone, but most know me as “Anna.” This name was given to me by my uncle’s sponsor’s family. Without a sponsor from the U.S., my family would have never escaped Laos and my name would have never been “Anna.” We as humans attach our whole identities to our names. Our names hold history. Born in Laos, but raised in America, mine just happens to be related to the American Secret War in Laos. I am the Sr. Executive Intern at Legacies of War, a U.S.-based organization that advocates for U.S. governmental funding towards global UXO clearance with special focus on Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. I am also a Mine Action Fellow through Mine Action Canada and am currently studying land release in Laos as a Fulbright U.S. Student. Through all of these connections to the global campaign, I am honored to represent the Cluster Munition Coalition here today.

This year we mark a milestone: 15 years since the adoption and signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008.

Great accomplishments have been made since then.

Cluster munitions have faced widespread stigmatization. We can witness it, especially this year when the U.S. decision to transfer cluster munitions to Ukraine caused an international outcry, saw critical media coverage, and attracted concern from dozens of leaders, officials, and organizations around the world.

Yet, we can see hope as the Convention stands strong with 112 States Parties and 11 Signatories – we were delighted to see Nigeria and South Sudan joining this year! We applaud and welcome them and are calling on others to follow very soon!

Collectively, States Parties have destroyed 99% of their cluster munition stocks, totaling almost 1.5 million units.

Large tracts of contaminated land have been cleared and returned to local communities and to productive use, including in the most cluster munition-affected country, Laos, due to the United States bombing the country for 9 long years. Just last month, I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the positive impact of clearance on local communities. Villagers can now engage in farming without the constant fear of accidental encounters with unexploded submunitions and they can cultivate crops that provide essential support for their families.

All this should be celebrated!

Sadly, these great successes were recently overshadowed by the widespread use of cluster munitions in Ukraine, as well as new uses in Syria and Myanmar. Only last year these atrocious and indiscriminate weapons killed and maimed 1200 people worldwide. This is the highest annual number of casualties from cluster munitions that has been recorded by the Monitor since 2010 when the Convention entered into force.

I am disappointed that these weapons are used today in Ukraine, Myanmar, and Syria as they were fifty years ago in Laos, which is still struggling with this deadly legacy today! It saddens me to hear more of these weapons are being transferred to cause further death and destruction! Isn't it unacceptable and heartbreaking that 95% of all casualties are civilians, with children accounting for more than 70% of all casualties of cluster munition remnants?!

During my visit to Houaphan Province, in Laos, we went to see how risk education was carried out in multiple villages and noticed a bomb hanging on a tree. The villagers used it as a bell and the children did not know what it was. [LONG PAUSE]

There is much work ahead of us.

Those still remaining outside must renounce the weapon and join our Convention without delay and work together to eradicate cluster bombs from our planet once and for all!

There are still 29 countries and other areas that remain contaminated by cluster munitions, including 11 States Parties to the convention. Affected states need to do more and better with clearing this life-threatening contamination the fastest they can while respecting their convention deadlines. Donor states must do a better job of ensuring the needed resources for countries so they can become free of cluster munitions as soon as possible. After visiting many clearance sites, I understand the need for deadline extensions in certain situations, where there is massive contamination, insecurity, unforgiving weather, and challenging landscapes.

During my visit, we drove for 2 and a half hours. Drizzling rain washed down our windows as we saw a double rainbow throughout the car ride. Every second our team gasped while looking out into the lush mountains. Beautiful as these mountains are, I later learned that this terrain makes it difficult and dangerous for brave deminers working to clear and release land for the local communities. Imagine having to hike up a mountain while demining. It is difficult.

Otherwise, clearance of cluster munitions remnants must be addressed with urgency, and remain a priority for all States Parties, so must risk education.

Ensuring accessible and adequate assistance to victims poses another great challenge. I recently learned that individuals requiring critical medical care due to UXO-related incidents in Houaphan Province must endure a 6-hour mountainous journey to Lao's Xieng Khouang Province for treatment! This is due to the lack of equipped facilities in the small local hospitals. There is still enormous need to ensure that assistance reaches all victims of cluster munitions in Laos and other affected countries.

I and my friends from the Cluster Munition Coalition are thrilled to be here this week and we look forward to working together with you all to address these great challenges, to push for more progress, and to make our Convention even stronger.

We expect this 11th Meeting of States Parties to send a united and strong message to the world that:

- We are horrified by the high number of casualties;
- We strongly oppose and condemn all use of cluster munitions.
- All use, production, and transfer need to stop.
- We call on all those outside to join the convention without delay;
- And we commit to redoubling our efforts and resources to reach a world free of cluster munitions as soon as possible, and in our lifetime.

Thank you.