

Your excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, friends.

It is with great privilege and a profound sense of responsibility that we, the Mine Action Fellows, stand before this esteemed assembly once again. It has been one year since we last addressed this gathering, and in that span of time, the world has seen both progress and persistent challenges in the realm of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

This Convention has achieved noteworthy milestones, expanded collaborative efforts, and witnessed the dedication of countless individuals and organisations committed to the alleviation of cluster munitions' dire consequences. Our collective dedication and tireless work have undoubtedly made a difference in the lives of many.

This year, this community has much to celebrate. We want to thank and congratulate South Sudan and Nigeria for joining the Convention! Bosnia and Herzegovina cleared the last cluster munitions on its land; Slovakia, Bulgaria and South Africa destroyed their stockpiles! We applaud and welcome these important achievements!

While we have things to celebrate, we cannot ignore the harm done by States Not Party. Many are dying and suffering from Cluster Munitions. Is this the world that we want to build?

Look at Syria, Ukraine, and Myanmar. Cluster munitions are destroying the lives of innocent civilians in these countries at this very moment. This year, the Cluster Munition Monitor reported the highest number of casualties since the Convention first entered into force, with 1172 people killed or injured. It has been emphasised all week that 95% of casualties are civilians, with children accounting for more than 70% of casualties of cluster munition remnants. We haven't even mentioned the sustainable development impacts in other countries who are also still living with this legacy of war like Iraq, Laos, and Cambodia.

In this room, some States Parties have shown reluctance to condemn the use and transfer of this weapon. Remember, you are party to a Convention that requires you to make your best efforts to discourage States Not Party from using cluster munitions. From our work in communities affected by cluster munitions, where people are killed and injured, far away from this fancy room, we find this incomprehensible and disappointing. To make a difference, we have to be brave and speak up, and work together to not only remove the cluster munitions but also to prevent them from being produced in the future.

People are the centre of this treaty and therefore the heart of our efforts.

Mine action has been proven to save lives, and many of the efforts of those present here have contributed to the guarantee of human rights, the protection of civilians, and the development and peace-building efforts that motivate us as humanity. These 15 years of implementing the Convention have shown us that mine action is not just numbers and amount of land cleared - it is about people and social transformation. Therefore, we must strive for data collection not focused only on square metres, but on the characteristics of the beneficiaries also. What are their ages, gender, ethnicities and abilities? This knowledge will ensure that the development that comes after land clearance will truly adapt to the needs of the people.

As part of the Mine Action Fellows program we have seen the importance of real inclusion and diversity. This program consists of around 90 young women and men invested in disarmament, many from affected countries. Our group is unique. Our diverse backgrounds and experiences have allowed us to build a support network to learn from each other. Our network makes our work on implementation and universalization stronger.

Universalisation carries a profound message – it urges us to come together as a global community to address a grave humanitarian concern.

Together, we must work tirelessly to clear affected areas of cluster munitions, support survivors, and promote global awareness of the consequences of their use. Universalisation calls for our unwavering commitment to safeguarding the future, where children can walk to school without fear, where communities can rebuild without danger, and where the wounds of war can heal.

Being here this week, we have learned a few very important lessons.

Hopelessness is a driver of violence, but this Convention can offer hope to so many. We believe that empowering youth is what keeps this hope alive. We want all States Parties to support and promote youth development programs in mine action including mine risk education and victim assistance. We encourage states who have the capacity to do so, to fund economic and social inclusion for victims and survivors.

The annual transparency reports are a crucial tool to show a strong level of devotion to humanitarian goals. In 2023, many countries have shown this devotion by submitting their reports. However, we are disappointed that there are still States Parties that have not yet done so. We insist that all States Parties carry out their responsibility of submitting their Article 7 reports in a timely manner.

We would like to encourage States Parties to destroy all stockpiles and retained cluster munitions. Retaining stockpiles means that there is a chance that these weapons can be used in the future. Storing live cluster munitions for training or scientific research is unnecessary.

As young people from different parts of the world, from countries affected by cluster munitions, donor countries, and those not upholding the norms of the Convention, we are committed to keeping this Convention alive. We extend our interest to be included at all levels of implementation. You can count on us to uphold the norms of the Convention including by keeping all States accountable.

We want to thank our donors: Switzerland, Canada and the United Kingdom. Thank you for making this possible and facilitating this strong network that we are building together. We also want to thank everyone who took the time to speak with and listen to us. We hope that the perspectives we shared stand as a reminder to include the younger generation in your national perspectives on this issue. We clearly have something to say.

The 124 states that have joined the Convention have committed not to use cluster munitions under any circumstance and to actively discourage their use. Thank you to those States Parties who have spoken on the full range of this Convention. However, we have seen reluctance in condemning the use of cluster munitions by anyone, anywhere, and specifically in condemning the transfer of cluster munitions by the United States. Let us be clear, producing, using and transferring cluster munitions by any actor, under any circumstance is unacceptable. Cluster munitions disproportionately affect civilians and thereby also violate international humanitarian law. We call for an immediate stop to the transfer and use of this indiscriminate weapon.

Again, there is no room for cluster munitions in the future we are building. Thank you.