

CMC Statement on Victim Assistance

*Convention on Cluster Munitions 12th Meeting of States Parties,
Geneva, 10-13 September 2024*

Thank you, Madame President,

Before I deliver our statement, I would like to first extend warm welcome to Mr. Rachid Basha, a cluster munition survivor on the delegation of Lebanon. We were inspired to hear his story earlier today and we want to thank (Welcome Rachid in Arabic).

The Cluster Munition Coalition would like to remind you, that today, just as it has been the case for the past two decades, since 2003, when we first called for a ban on these weapons, the staggering majority of victims continue to be civilians. This year's Cluster Munition Monitor reports that 93% of all casualties recorded in 2023 were civilians, almost half of them children.

Remnants of these weapons continue to kill and injure for decades after the conflict ended. The figures speak for themselves: in 2023 new casualties from cluster munitions remnants were recorded in eight countries, namely Azerbaijan, Iraq, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Mauritania, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

While the global number of survivors, families of those killed or injured, and wider affected communities continues growing, our efforts to address the existing needs and prevent future harm must be redoubled.

Data collection, as one of the pillars of victim assistance, remains as important as ever. Indeed, one of the major challenges faced by affected states is to collect data in order to effectively plan VA interventions with the aim of ensuring a comprehensive response to address the needs of cluster munitions and Explosive Ordnance victims. We want to remind states that data sitting in a data bank doesn't help survivors unless it is translated into services in places where survivors live. Local communities can be the best sources of data and peer survivors the best implementers. It is also important to take into account gender, age, disability and other diversity factors.

While some progress has been made in implementing the VA obligations under the convention, many States Parties face significant challenges in providing adequate, accessible, affordable and inclusive services.

Healthcare systems in Afghanistan and Lebanon were severely compromised in 2023, with increased restrictions on access to health services for women and girls in Afghanistan, and for refugees in Lebanon. Limited progress was made on socio-economic inclusion and financial assistance for victims, leaving many needs unmet.

We therefore call on affected States Parties to do their utmost to ensure that direct and indirect victims are integrated in all national policies and legal frameworks relating to health, education, social protection, employment, or poverty reduction. We also remind states to include cluster munitions victims in all decision-making processes that affect them.

Bridges need to be built between the disarmament, humanitarian and development sectors. Many existing frameworks, tools, and resources could be synergized to achieve these goals, such as:

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the SDGs
- The IMAS 13.10 on VA,
- The recent World Health Organization resolutions on: integrated emergency, critical and operative care, on rehabilitation, and on assistive technology,
- and, the IASC guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action.

It is a great concern that the lack of sustainable funding remains a major impediment to addressing the long-term needs of victims. We call on donor states to maintain support, and to integrate VA efforts into more funding envelopes (such as development or humanitarian) in countries affected by cluster munitions, landmines and other EO. Madame President/Chair, preventing harm to civilians is at the heart of this convention. Inclusion and assistance of victims of cluster munitions is not a box-ticking exercise to comply with a provision, it is a moral as well as a legal obligation.

Lastly, we are all concerned about the threat to the integrity of the convention and its norms, and the International Humanitarian Law more broadly. The Cluster Munition Coalition is alarmed to have to reiterate the obvious arguments for ending casualties and suffering that were necessary at the time of the discussions of the Oslo Process some twenty years ago.

Rather, at this time, our collective efforts should be focusing on addressing the impact of these indiscriminate weapons, providing assistance to the victims, who also worked so hard to get this convention, for their rights and a for future without cluster munitions.

Thank you.