



Twelfth Meeting of States Parties of the Convention on Cluster Munitions

Geneva, 10 to 13 September 2024

International Committee of the Red Cross

Statement on Universalization

Thank you, Madam President

Let me on behalf of the ICRC commend the in-depth manner in which your Presidency has prepared this Meeting of States Parties, with wide-ranging consultations, and wish you every success in guiding our work.

The ICRC also wishes to commend you, Madam President and the Universalization coordinators, Malawi and Peru, for your efforts over the last year to promote adherence to the Convention by non-party States. We call on all states who have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the convention without delay and to renounce using, producing, transferring, and stockpiling cluster munitions.

As underscored by the ICRC Vice-President yesterday, the Convention on Cluster Munitions stands at a juncture. This session on universalization holds particular significance, as there have been only two ratifications since 2020 and for the first time in the history of this Convention, a State Party has initiated withdrawal proceedings citing security concerns.

This is not the first time that security arguments have been put forward to challenge the norm that cluster munitions are abhorrent weapons that should not be used by anyone, anywhere. While the convention was being negotiated two decades ago, many arguments were raised on technological advancements in cluster munitions technology, the low rate of unexploded ammunition in test conditions, the presence of enhanced safety mechanism and self-destruct features among others. However, none of these arguments could counter the irrefutable

evidence that came from theatres of conflict. Cluster munitions disproportionately affected civilians including children, they were inaccurate and unreliable weapons systems, they contaminated land for decades and were a persistent threat to military and civilian clearance teams.

What was true then, continues to be true now.

Humanitarian considerations brought the world together to ban this weapon that keeps on killing and these considerations will continue to trump any suggestion that this weapon is an acceptable one. The need to prevent this weapon from ever being used in the future must override short term arguments to retain them.

Nevertheless, the ICRC remains optimistic that any State contemplating withdrawal may yet reverse their course. This pivotal moment presents a unique opportunity for renewed and strengthened commitment to the humanitarian principles that lie at the heart of this Convention. The Convention on Cluster Munitions is indeed part of a framework of treaties that exist to prevent or alleviate human suffering in armed conflict. This Convention, like other IHL treaties, set out practical rules to ensure protection in the worst of times. Ratifying or acceding to the CCM or to other IHL treaties is not an aspirational goal for peacetime. It is a strong commitment that protective rules will be respected in the event of an armed conflict. This is directly tied to the responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law that every State Party to this Convention shares.

Madame President, in alignment with the core mandate of the ICRC, we strongly encourage all States to ratify or accede to the Convention and to work collaboratively towards achieving a global ban on cluster munitions. Our commitment to this cause remains resolute and unwavering.

As such, the ICRC stands ready to assist States as they walk this crucial path. Our range of institutional capabilities—from the ICRC Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law in Geneva to our missions worldwide and our delegation to the United Nations in New York—remains fully available to provide technical assistance to States as they reinforce humanitarian values by joining and remaining committed to this Convention.

The ICRC has continued over the last year to promote the Convention in a variety of ways, working together with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies towards this goal.

The ICRC co organized a session on universalization of the convention for African states in Geneva. The consultation brought together disarmament diplomats and directors from mine action authorities to discuss opportunities and challenges in joining the convention. We participated as expert speakers in universalization events organized by the Presidency and

ISU in New York and continued to raise the issue bilaterally with states from Latin America and Asia.

We have included the Convention in the ICRC's regional and national events to promote universalization and implementation of IHL treaties. In July 2024, the ICRC organized the Pacific Island Roundtable and discussed the universalization of the CCM among other humanitarian disarmament treaties. We will continue to discuss the convention with ECOWAS states in Abuja later this year. We are confident that these universalization efforts will bear fruit and we will continue them next year by placing this Convention on the agenda of several regional IHL events, including an event with the African Union in Addis Ababa.

Madam President, we must all seize the momentum of this seventy fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the Twelfth Meeting of States Parties to increase our efforts in promoting the universal adherence to International Humanitarian Law and advocate for the universal observance of the Convention's norms, with a view to achieving the goal of bringing about a world free of cluster munitions.

Thank you.