

Item 3j i): Emerging challenges to the norm prohibiting cluster munitions

United Kingdom Intervention:

Thank you, Mr. President, and our thanks too to Austria for coordinating this section.

As the UK's Minister of State for International Development said last week, the UK remains fully committed to both the CCM and to the Ottawa Treaty. We recognise the importance of the humanitarian norms that underpin them, given the devastating long-term impacts of these weapons, and the role they play in promoting these norms both among States Parties and non-States Parties alike.

While we firmly believe that the use of cluster munitions is highly likely to lead to indiscriminate and disproportionate impacts on civilians, the UK does not share the view that cluster munitions are themselves inherently indiscriminate and from that contrary to IHL.

The UK continues to engage non-States Parties to discourage the use of cluster munitions and to join the Convention. And we have also been engaged both with those states who have taken the decision to withdraw from the CCM, as well as those who have announced their intention to withdraw from the Ottawa Treaty.

While we have worked towards a different outcome, we must not forget that the impetus for all these decisions stems from Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, and that a number of states sharing a border with Russia rightly perceive it as a grave security threat.

We cannot ignore that something has changed, but we should also not overstate where these decisions leave the Convention or humanitarian disarmament regimes more generally. What matters is what we do next.

Firstly, we should not shut the door to states who have taken the decision to withdraw. This will not be in the interests of either treaty or their norms nor will it promote universalisation. The UK is continuing to engage states on the actions they plan to take. Over the short-term, where they have chosen to leave, we will discourage the use of these systems, encourage them to ensure close adherence to treaty core principles and act as exemplars outside the regime. Over the medium-term, we will work to understand what can be done to encourage them back into the treaties as we continue our work to universalise them.

Secondly, the community needs to take stock and to learn lessons in our approach and consider new ways we can continue to protect the important norms the Treaty has established.

In closing, the CCM – and the Ottawa Treaty – have been hugely successful both in terms of their implementation and in terms of the establishment of strong norms. We should not lose sight of this. We look forward to continuing to look at ways to build forward to ensure the continued implementation and universalisation of the Convention.