



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva
at the **13th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions**
Geneva, 16 September 2025

Mr. President,

At the outset, my Delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Philippines for its commitment to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and to thank Ambassador Sorreta, as well as his team and the Implementation Support Unit, for organizing valuable humanitarian and disarmament education activities for the youth.

My Delegation also joins the previous speakers in warmly welcoming and congratulating Vanuatu for its accession to this Convention. In this regard, it is important to recall that engaging in efforts towards the universalization of the Convention is not an optional element: it is a legal obligation¹. In fact, universalization has direct implications and far-reaching consequences for the operation and effective implementation of this legal instrument, particularly with regard to the provision of assistance to victims, as well as to prevent further casualties.

Adherence to and respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, are not a form of weakness. On the contrary, they are a noble form of responsibility towards all humanity. Moreover, humanitarian disarmament treaties involve not only legal obligations, but they also constitute moral commitments to present and future generations. Ultimately, it is truly “by the force of reason, not the force of arms, that justice makes its way.”² My Delegation therefore calls upon all States that are not yet party to this Convention to adhere to it urgently and implement it promptly, in both letter and spirit.

Mr. President,

Protecting civilians, assisting victims and preventing further casualties were among the main compelling reasons why this Convention came into existence. The Holy See therefore deplores the fact that cluster munitions, with their extended destructive consequences on victims and land, continue to be produced, stockpiled, transferred and even *used* in armed conflicts.

¹ Cf. Convention on Cluster Munitions, art. 21,

² Cf. Pius XII, *Appeal for Peace*, 24 August 1939.

As many States Parties and non-Parties to this Convention unfortunately know far too well, the deadly legacy of cluster munitions continues to haunt many innocent victims who have suffered the cruelty of conflicts. In this regard, as a “family of nations”, assistance to victims should be seen as a shared responsibility, rooted in international cooperation and solidarity.

From a broader perspective, the vast proportion of human and economic resources allocated to armaments - with global military expenditure skyrocketing to over 2,7 trillion USD³ last year - is a matter of grave imbalance and even scandal. This is particularly evident when compared to the limited resources dedicated to assisting victims of conflicts or those in need, feeding the hungry, and promoting integral human development. Still, no lasting peace is possible without true disarmament.⁴

Moreover, “the requirement that every people provide for its own defense must not turn into a race to rearmament”⁵. While every country's commitment to safeguarding sovereignty and security is legitimate and necessary, the question always arises as to how much strengthening military power can help foster trust between nations and contribute to building lasting peace. In fact, the right to self-defense is not absolute. It must be accompanied not only by the duty to minimize and, where possible, eliminate the root causes or threat of conflict, but also by the duty to limit military capabilities to those strictly necessary for security and legitimate defense. The excessive accumulation of weapons, including those that have indiscriminate effects, while often allowing for a sought-after strategic and military advantage, also runs the risk of further fueling the arms race, fomenting threats and fears of others, and contributing to a destabilization that can lead to a dramatic situation for all. In that regard, it is urgent to restore a peaceful balance in international relations and continue a coordinated effort to promote peace-building disarmament.

Amidst the current recrudescence of arms races, the Holy See urges States to be “resolute in promoting effective disarmament and arms control negotiations and in strengthening international humanitarian law by reaffirming the preeminent and inherent value of human dignity, the centrality of the human person, and the ‘elementary considerations of humanity’.”⁶ Indeed, as Pope Leo recently recalled: “Peace, not conflict, is our most cherished dream, and [...] building this peace is a task we undertake together.”⁷

Thank you.

³ <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2024>

⁴ Cfr. Pope Francis, *Urbi et Orbi* Message, 20 April 2025.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Holy See's Declaration upon Ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, 3 December 2008.

⁷ Pope Leo XIV, Message to the Participants to the Interreligious Meeting, Bangladesh, 9 September 2025.