

Convention on Cluster Munitions

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Other relevant matters for achieving the aims of the Convention

Stakeholder Dialogues during the Intersessional Meeting of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, April 2025

Submitted by the President of the Thirteenth Meeting of States Parties*

1. Mandated by the 12MSP, and with appreciation to Austria, thematic Coordinator on General Status and Operations, and the ISU for the support rendered to the President in the substantive preparations for and moderation of the informal discussions of stakeholder dialogues, the 2025 intersessional meetings included as an agenda item The challenges and concerns raised in developments in the context of the Convention and Humanitarian Disarmament at large.
2. Following the concerns raised by stakeholders with regard to recent challenges posed to the norms prohibiting cluster munitions, and implications for wider humanitarian disarmament, peace, and development goals, four items were discussed as a first opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on and consider concrete actions for the way ahead. These included:

I. Norms under challenge

3. Prompted by the announcement of withdrawal of a State Party for the first time in the history of the Convention, State Parties discussed the impact on the norms established by the Convention and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) more broadly. Concerned with these developments, a majority of States Parties sought stronger compliance with legal treaty obligations “to promote universal adherence to and strict observance of the Convention’s norms, including to discourage, in every possible way, the use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions”.
4. In line with the Lausanne Action Plan, which underlines the urgent need for further efforts to promote the norms established by the Convention, the dialogue placed the Convention as a key disarmament treaty within the broader context of IHL and humanitarian principles underlining the international legal framework. By revisiting the arguments brought forward in the conception of the Convention, States Parties, signatories and other stakeholders had the opportunity to recall the origins of the Convention, regain confidence in the ongoing validity and strength of the norm and discuss how to reinforce the stigma established with these weapons, with the view to discouraging any new use of these weapons, and foster a universal understanding of the preventative dimensions of legally binding humanitarian disarmament instruments.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

5. The session sought to engage in a collaborative effort with the other humanitarian disarmament legal instruments and political declarations to foster synergies and share best practices aimed at strengthening their role as key instruments of IHL and reinforcing their humanitarian character in protecting civilians, addressing the impact of armed conflict and contributing to lasting peace and security as well as reconciliation and sustainable development for all concerned.

6. In conclusion, the original arguments underpinning the Convention were presented and reaffirmed their continued validity. An active participation demonstrated a strong commitment to the Convention and engagement with the challenges it faces. A large number of States Parties reiterated their commitment to the Convention, the need to reinforce the stigma against cluster munitions, and to redouble efforts to implement the Lausanne Action Plan. Even as different views were expressed regarding the state of the Convention and the recent withdrawal of a State Party, there was unity in these matters and the shared commitment to the Convention.

7. States Parties stated that the use of cluster munitions is not in line with IHL and underscored the importance of continuing to condemn their use by any actor, under any circumstances. It also underlined how the Convention can promote IHL, including through obligations under Articles 1 and 21, taking affirmative steps to encourage others to ratify or accede. Reference was made to LAP Action 11 and the need to discourage any use and to remain engaged with States not party to the Convention.

8. Proposals put forward during the session included the possible establishment of a new working group on compliance. It emphasized the need to find new ways to implement the Convention and to advance universalization. The Convention has made a tangible difference in saving lives and in fostering cooperation and accountability, which are strong arguments for further universalization.

9. Looking ahead to the 13MSP, the moderator stated that the session had provided a concrete basis for identifying ways to strengthen the Convention and reaffirmed its intention, as Coordinator on General Status and Operation, to continue working with the Coordination Committee and the Presidency on possible next steps.

II. Capacity constraints for Victim Assistance, considering the significant increase in victims of war

10. Addressing the consequences of cluster munitions is not just about preventing their use but also about managing their short- and long-term effects, which remain uncertain and wide-reaching. In light of the sharp increase in and ongoing conflicts, it is increasingly evident that our collective capacity is becoming overstretched.

11. Highlighting from the UN Secretary-General's 2024 Report on the Protection of Civilians,¹ in Ukraine, from February 2022 to September 2023, the number of persons with disabilities surged from 300,000 to approximately 3 million as a result of the conflict, underlining the role of conflict, and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in particular, in causing temporary or permanent impairments. Whether in Gaza, the Sudan, Ukraine, or elsewhere, many of those affected lack access to medical and rehabilitation services, and many more civilians will be at risk of future impairment from explosive remnants of war.

12. In line with CRPD commitments of "integrated and non-discriminatory assistance" and as outlined by the CCM Article 5.2 e, not to discriminate against or among cluster munitions victims, or between cluster munitions victims and those who suffer injuries or disabilities from other causes will require an unprecedented scale up of physical and psychosocial medical support and rehabilitation to meet medical, rehabilitative, psychological and socio-economic needs.

13. Two diverging realities are currently impacting victim assistance: the number of civilians affected by war, including by cluster munitions, is sharply increasing, creating an

¹ S/2024/385, paragraph 31.

urgent need for collective attention and action, whilst resources are increasingly constrained by the ongoing cost of war and declining funding commitments. In this context, we must ask how the rights of a growing number of victims to participate equally and effectively in society can be upheld.

14. Three core challenges were highlighted:

- 1) **The need for stronger national ownership.** Victim assistance must be a multi-sectoral undertaking, yet in many affected contexts, there is no clear government body responsible for leading or coordinating these efforts, or existing structures remain disconnected from national disability, health, and social protection frameworks. Better integration into national policies would help embed victim assistance within a broader national vision. The LAP identifies three priorities in this regard: establishing a centralized database of victims and their needs, a national referral mechanism, and a comprehensive directory of services. While NGOs and civil society have a role to play in maintaining these, without central ownership, such efforts often remain fragmented and inaccessible. These measures do not happen organically but require deliberate policy decisions and sustained technical and financial support.
- 2) **The persistent gap in service provision,** particularly in rural or conflict-affected areas. Many survivors still lack access to essential services such as rehabilitation, psychosocial support, or economic inclusion. Barriers such as cost, distance, lack of transportation, shortage of qualified personnel, stigma, and limited awareness among survivors are common and compounded by financial constraints and the short-term nature of many interventions, leaving long-term needs unmet. To address this, more earmarked funding for broader victim assistance efforts is needed with flexible, multi-year commitments that extend beyond rehabilitation to include mental health and socio-economic support. The importance of mobile and decentralized service delivery models, such as training community-level actors, to provide support in remote and affordable ways is also critical.
- 3) **The importance of including survivors and persons with disabilities** in decision-making processes concerning their care and support. Survivors are too often not meaningfully involved in the development of policies, services, or monitoring systems, which risks creating responses that do not fully reflect their needs or experiences. To honour the Convention's commitments, States must ensure survivor participation in the planning, design and implementation of victim assistance programmes, including through formal mechanisms for national-level engagement and by supporting local organizations of persons with disabilities as equal partners.

15. While the challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. The biggest barriers are often not technical, but political, structural, and bureaucratic. Overcoming these would require bold thinking, continued investment, and leadership from States Parties, including a reimagining of how victim assistance is delivered in fragile contexts. Without such action, the Convention's commitments to victims will remain unmet, but with it, a comprehensive and holistic response is within reach.

16. Adhering to IHL as a moral and practical guardrail in conflicts also directly affects our ability to ensure the protection of civilians, lowering the number of civilian casualties of war with temporary or permanent impairments, whilst increasing the likelihood of peace and reconciliation among affected communities.

III. Significant budget cuts impacting on the implementation of operative actions under the CCM, including victim assistance, stockpile destruction and clearance under International Cooperation and Assistance

17. The global humanitarian landscape is at a critical juncture shaped by two intersecting trends: the US suspension of humanitarian aid programs and traditional donor states reallocating development assistance toward defence spending. These shifts threaten to impact

international cooperation, with a potential of weakening commitments made under humanitarian conventions, specifically jeopardizing clearance operations and victim assistance, and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in conflict-affected regions.

18. The picture is complex and varies significantly by region and country. The current situation could also not be attributed to a single donor's reduction in support. Rather, it reflected a broader global funding crisis, including increased military spending and economic pressures. While implementers are accustomed to fluctuations in funding, the current climate presents a new level of unpredictability for international cooperation and assistance. This context demands a rethinking of how such assistance is structured and delivered, not only under the CCM and APMBC, but also more broadly across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors.

19. The implications of these cuts are far-reaching. For people living in affected areas, this is not just about policy, but about safety, homes and futures. Profound consequences of unexpected halts in operations can be expected, which puts people in harm's way and can undermine progress towards fulfilling the Convention's obligations. These disruptions have a significant impact on the lives of affected communities and the thousands of people working in mine action, along with their families, and will inevitably demand even greater resources. The importance of responsible demobilization when funding comes to an end must also be stressed. Even with the best intentions, no programme can be funded indefinitely. However, sudden cuts and late notifications often leave implementing organizations to cover redundancy costs from their own humanitarian reserves and, more importantly, fail to meet moral obligations to staff. Each job lost often belongs to one of the very brave deminers working to protect their own communities, a human impact that must be kept in view when decisions on funding are made.

20. The credibility and effectiveness of the Convention itself may be at risk as with ongoing conflicts, climate change and natural disasters fuelling more displacement, the movement of people into contaminated areas is increasing, contributing to an even greater humanitarian challenge. It is therefore in everyone's interest to ensure people can live and work safely in the places they choose. Three key questions in response to the current situation were posed:

- 1) How do we adapt?
- 2) How do we become more effective and fit for purpose? and
- 3) How do we meet growing needs on the ground?

21. Recent months have shown how unsustainable it is to rely on a small group of traditional donors. The sector's vulnerability to sudden changes has become clear. While it remains essential for existing donors to stay engaged, the need to broaden and diversify the donor base is critical. This would include encouraging more States to contribute and actively seeking alternative funding sources, such as philanthropic contributions and private sector partnerships. Such efforts must be undertaken responsibly, with thorough due diligence to avoid conflicts of interest, corruption or actions that might undermine ethical standards or the "do no harm" principle.

22. Much of today's funding is directed at a relatively limited number of affected countries, whether within or outside the Convention. Meanwhile, many States Parties with light, medium or legacy contamination receive little or no support, often despite doing everything possible to meet their obligations. To address this, the establishment of a voluntary trust fund for Article 4 implementation, which would allow States Parties unable to offer major contributions or administer grants to provide smaller amounts into a pooled resource. Such a fund could ensure that affected countries overlooked by donor priorities are not left behind and could also incentivize universalization by encouraging participation from affected States currently outside the Convention. It would also be important to maintain focus on affected States Parties actively working to meet Article 4 obligations. The case of Lebanon was stressed suggesting that the situation would already look markedly different had donor support been sustained.

23. The work to explore this possibility was recently incorporated in the Siem Reap–Angkor Action Plan under the APMBC. With mine action as an inter-instrument activity,

benefitting across several humanitarian disarmament treaties, synergies should be sought, and it should now be considered for the CCM as well.

24. The need to reassess the bureaucratic challenges tied to funding was also raised. As aid budgets are reduced, administrative requirements, such as extensive reporting and procedural demands, remain unchanged or have even increased. These demands consume valuable resources and further strain programme implementation. Streamlined procedures were sought and flexible, multi-year funding and partnerships were stated could reduce excessive grant management burdens and enable a more sustainable and effective approach to funding.

25. This interim period of constrained aid budgets could also be prolonged. The importance of learning from the situation, particularly by focusing on sustainability and community resilience to reduce vulnerability to funding volatility was stressed. One area requiring urgent attention is localization and this must not be treated as a temporary trend or sectoral jargon, but rather as an essential component of effective and sustainable programming. Strengthening this focus is critical, especially in contexts where clearance is not immediately feasible.

26. How do we protect communities affected by cluster munitions who may never see clearance in their lifetimes? A statement made by Mauritania, observed that while clearance is often considered the core purpose of the Convention, the current environment demands an expanded view, one that elevates the role of risk education and victim assistance. These elements must not be treated as supplementary to clearance, but prioritized and sufficiently funded, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings. Donors are often hesitant to support risk education when it is not directly linked to clearance activities, but such work is foundational to reducing civilian harm and supporting implementation of the Convention's cross-cutting obligations, including on gender and diversity.

27. International operations rooted in partnerships with local organizations are critical for sustainability, whether on clearance, risk education or victim assistance. Focused on genuine institutional capacity-building rather than on transactional arrangements, the activities can continue also when international staff are pulled. While access concerns contributed to a drop in donor support, strong partnerships can provide that assurance as national partners continue to deliver and even expand risk education activities also in situations of renewed conflict. Such resilience is not possible without earlier investment in local partnerships.

28. Sustainability also requires investment in national institutions responsible for implementing the CCM. When affected States demonstrate strong national ownership, including financial commitment, international cooperation and assistance should be provided in response. Support is most efficient when aligned with national plans that are clear and time bound. Sustainability must be a guiding principle across all international assistance, particularly when resources are limited.

29. International implementers do not aim to stay until the last mine is cleared, nor to always deliver services directly. Instead, the objective must be to ensure a locally owned and sustainable approach that fits the context. This requires that all organizations continuously reflect on their operational models and their role in supporting localization and resilience. Donors were urged to remain open to channelling funds to local partners.

IV. Increased significance of Risk Education considering reduced level of clearance activities:

30. With clearance programs stalled or cancelled, communities in affected states are left exposed to the threat of unexploded ordnance. In this vacuum, knowledge and risk behaviour emerges as the last line of defence to prevent civilian casualties, with explosive ordnance risk education becoming the primary tool to save lives due to -among others- its immediate impact and low-cost scalability.

31. In the current global context—where international assistance is decreasing and clearance operations are increasingly delayed, slowed down, or even impossible due to conflict in some areas—risk education stands out even more as the most immediate action to

protect civilians. Through both in-person and digital outreach, integration into school curricula, collaboration with other sectors and partnerships with local communities, risk education equips individuals with critical knowledge to recognize, avoid and sometimes report explosive ordnance hazards.

32. Risk education contributes to reducing casualties, fostering safer behaviour and enabling people to live and work with greater security. Beyond its immediate impact, risk education serves as a bridge between humanitarian action and long-term development by contributing to a safer environment, which is essential for socio-economic recovery and progress, even if clearance activities have yet to arrive. In Lao PDR, while the war ended 50 years ago, the number of casualties remained above 300 per year in the early years. This number dropped to 119 by 2010, the year the CCM entered into force, and further decreased to 49 in 2024. This significant reduction is attributed, in part to the extensive risk education efforts carried out across the country by both national and international UXO and mine action operators, delivered through multiple channels and activities, including integration into primary and secondary school curricula, regular awareness campaigns via television and radio, and the distribution of educational materials in local communities.

33. Increased efforts to improve risk education methodology and expand integration with other sectors is needed, with the integration of risk education with victim assistance was cited as an example, using accident data and analysis to guide more effective and creative solutions. Risk education is also being linked with disaster prevention efforts.

34. The increasing use of digital tools in EORE—including apps, social media, augmented and virtual reality—which accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic was also mentioned whilst stressing that such digital approaches are not intended to replace in-person engagement, but rather to complement them. In many cases, low-tech solutions such as SMS campaigns remain highly effective, depending on local contexts and information access patterns.

35. Emergency EORE responses have become increasingly critical, citing the recent example of Gaza, where technical working groups were rapidly established to facilitate coordination among operators. However, with the EORE sector at an inflection point, facing a convergence of funding crises, weakening normative commitments, and rising casualties and with risk education within mine action, already underfunded, it is now seriously threatened. In this context, now is not the time to deprioritize prevention activities such as risk education, which, while sometimes perceived as less tangible than square metres cleared, are no less vital.

36. In many places, risk education remains the only activity that can be implemented, either due to access restrictions or limited funding. Drawing from recent experience in Colombia, in some regions, risk education is the only feasible intervention. To maintain this momentum organizations must retain trained risk education personnel to respond quickly to emergencies. The importance of such institutional capacity had been demonstrated in Ukraine, Gaza and other contexts.

37. Similar to clearance, localization is critical for risk education citing the crucial role played by grassroots organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those with strong community presence were able to continue risk education activities even under severe restrictions. Stronger support to these networks is needed with national authorities set to lead efforts to deliver quality EORE, using existing standards and tools is critical both for sustaining and expanding risk education activities.

38. Some critical challenges were emphasized:

39. **The increasing contamination** caused by ongoing and new conflicts, including in Yemen, Syria and Ukraine. The presence of explosive ordnance in both urban and rural areas make it extremely difficult to ensure that all communities are adequately informed. Access to contaminated areas is often highly restricted, which limits the ability to deliver timely and targeted risk education. While efforts have been made to overcome these challenges through the use of digital tools, mass media and low-tech approaches, access constraints remain a significant issue worth mentioning.

40. **Weak or non-existent reporting mechanisms.** Communities frequently ask how to report ERWs but often receive no response when contacting hotlines. Even when a report is made, a timely operational response may not follow.

41. **The funding crisis.** Significant progress has been made in building local capacity to conduct media campaigns and develop innovative projects. However, as funding becomes uncertain, risk education is often one of the first areas to face cuts, even the staff who have been trained over several years. The funding gap may also threaten the sustainability of community-based risk education networks, which are often essential for rapid response in emergencies. Referring to the recent crisis in Gaza, she explained that the presence of an established volunteer network enabled a well-coordinated response—alongside international partners—including the dissemination of messages and the immediate delivery of risk education sessions in shelters. Such capacity must not be lost.

42. **National ownership.** While some champion States, such as Lao PDR, have demonstrated leadership by supporting volunteer networks and integrating risk education into education systems, this is not the case in many countries. Despite progress in improving the quality of risk education, mine action authorities are still not consistently involved in training volunteers or building local government capacity. Where organizations have built such capacity, insufficient effort is often made to sustain it.

43. Sustaining such capacity must become a priority, particularly at a time when resources are under threat. National mine action authorities are urged to play a more active role in this regard, particularly in engaging with initiatives that promote safer alternative behaviours.

44. National mine action authorities should also lead needs assessments at the national level. Too often, these are conducted by individual organizations within their project areas, which can lead to inefficiencies. National-level assessments could save resources and enable more efficient prioritization.

45. Despite these challenges, there are also important opportunities for the sector, including the use of mass media to reach hard-to-access areas and the integration of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital platforms, not only for session delivery but also for training and prioritization.

46. Concluding the dialogues the moderator noted the strong engagement and rich discussion which would serve well to inform further discussion at the 13MSP and the lead up to the Third Review Conference in 2026 during which a new Action Plan was envisioned to succeed the LAP.

47. To this end, noting the issues discussed and under pressure including the norms, victim assistance, international cooperation and assistance and the significant cuts on clearance and risk education, all vital and critical to the implementation of the Convention on Clusters Munitions, and taking note of the strong participation during the stakeholder dialogues, the President would therefore like to suggest that the 13MSP could request a continuation of the dialogues as substantive input to the forthcoming preparations of the Third Review Conference and propose that the President of the Third Review Conference seek ways to incorporate recommendations and concrete actions into the next Action Plan, expected in succession to the Lausanne Action Plan.
