



Thirteenth Meeting of States Parties of the Convention on Cluster Munitions

Geneva, 16 to 19 September 2025

International Committee of the Red Cross

Statement on Universalization

Thank you, Mister President

On behalf of the ICRC, I would like to 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, Mister President and the Universalization Coordinators, Norway and Peru, for your efforts over the last year to promote adherence to the Convention by non-party States. We would like to congratulate Vanuatu on ratifying the convention two weeks ago and 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, the Convention on Cluster Munitions stands at a juncture. This session on universalization holds particular significance, as there have been only three ratifications since 2020 and for the first time in the history of this Convention and from global humanitarian treaties more generally, a State Party has withdrawn from the convention citing security concerns.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 and their use by anyone, anywhere should be unequivocally condemned.

At the time 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 affect civilians including children, they are unreliable area weapons systems, they contaminate land for decades and are 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 long after hostilities have ceased, 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.

Next year will be the third review conference of the convention. 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 which prohibit use, development, production, acquisition, and stockpiling of these weapons 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.

Mister President, in alignment with its core mandate, the ICRC has continued over the last year to promote the Convention and other humanitarian disarmament treaties in a variety of ways. In August 2025, the Regional Conference on International Humanitarian Law in Asia and the Pacific took place in the Philippines, where discussions explored pathways to advancing the universalization of the CCM alongside other IHL treaties.

In Geneva, the ICRC convened on 3rd December 2024 a Peer Exchange between the Presidents and ISUs of the APMBC, CCM and CCW to better understand the challenges faced by conventional arms treaties in their universalization efforts and to explore best practices and recommendations for enhanced universalization work in the future.

I would like to share some of the recommendations that emanated from this peer exchange.

With respect to the presidencies, former, incoming, and current, participants recommended

- to strengthen and further structure the handover process be institutionalized to ensure that newly appointed presidencies can best build on previous progress building upon momentum created
- formalization or expansion of the informal “Troika+” meetings to promote information-sharing and maintain strategic focus across presidencies
- the participants emphasized the importance of leveraging regional champions to encourage peers to join or remain in the treaties and
- many underscored the need for rapid, coordinated responses when a state signals possible withdrawal, to prevent precedents that weaken international norms and standards

With respect to the ISUs participants recommended

- that engagement strategies be tailored to regional or national contexts, and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches
- a renewed communications approach to reframe humanitarian disarmament conventions as national security and socio-economic opportunities in addition to their humanitarian object and purpose.
- Finally, participants suggested that inter-treaty coordination could include shared victim assistance programs, compliance monitoring, and resource-pooling to reduce duplication.

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

Thank you.