

IHLI Oral Intervention under Item Universalization

Thank you, Mr./MS . Chair

I deliver this statement on behalf of the members of the International Humanitarian Law and Youth Initiative from the Global South. Many of them come from conflict-affected contexts and are unable to be present here today to raise their voices directly to States Parties. At a time when the world continues to face ongoing tensions and emerging conflicts, our future as young people — and the future of generations to come — lies in your hands. Safeguarding that future requires collective action to implement this Convention, to encourage non-States Parties to accede, and to ensure that those considering withdrawal remain committed.

We warmly welcome the accession of **Vanuatu** to the Convention and strongly encourage it to include youth within its national delegation and create space for youth-led initiatives in implementation and awareness-raising. We also take this opportunity to congratulate **Martina** on her achievement in the *Youth4Disarmament* competition her message has resonated with us despite differences in geography, language, and context. We further commend the Presidency of the Philippines and the Implementation Support Unit for meaningfully including youth voices in these discussions, coordinating with youth initiatives, and listening to their ideas.

Mr. President,

The Lausanne Action Plan provided an ambitious roadmap for the Convention. Yet, as we approach its conclusion in 2026, key gaps remain. In particular, the absence of structured engagement of youth especially young women from the Global South continues to limit the impact of the Convention. Youth from the Global South represent a majority in many affected countries and are among the most impacted by cluster munition contamination. Their voices are still largely absent in this room today. Their role must therefore evolve from symbolic participation to genuine partnership.

Looking forward, we stress the need for a **renewed roadmap** and stronger commitment from States Parties, one that ensures the full integration of youth and women as equal partners in universalization and implementation, including through:

- Explicit commitments in future action plans to involve youth in risk education, victim assistance, and advocacy;
- Supporting regional consultations where youth play an active role, in cooperation with States, the ISU, and regional organizations to advance universalization;
- Embedding youth and women-led initiatives in national coordination mechanisms, backed by sustainable funding and capacity-building.

Mr. President,

IHLI believe that Global South countries, such as **Syria**, which is currently undergoing a transitional phase, must be prioritized in universalization efforts. Engaging Syrian youth at this critical juncture could play a decisive role in raising awareness about the dangers of cluster munitions and the importance of joining the Convention. Our Initiative reaffirms its readiness to build partnerships and organize youth-led activities aimed at promoting accession, and we stand ready to cooperate with all stakeholders to facilitate such consultations. We therefore call on States Parties and partners to provide the necessary funding and support to empower Global South youth-led initiatives in convening these regional dialogues.

Finally, universalization is not merely a legal process of new accessions, but a humanitarian necessity to protect affected communities. Empowering young people to take the lead will strengthen the humanitarian goals of this Convention.

Thank you.