



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Head of Delegation of the Holy See at the Third Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions
Agenda Item 8 - Reaffirming the determination to put an end for all time to the suffering and casualties caused by cluster munitions
Vientiane, 14 September 2026

Mr. President,

At the outset, my Delegation would like to thank the Government of Laos for the warm welcome in Vientiane. Sixteen years after the historic first meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which laid “the foundations for expressing the exalting vision of the Convention in a concrete policy made up of plans, programmes and practical cooperation”¹, the Holy See expresses its closeness to all victims and their families and its sincere appreciation for Laos’ commitment to this key international instrument.

The desire for peace, security, and stability is one of the deepest longings of the human heart. At this review meeting, we rightly look to the past to celebrate the achievements of this Convention, which has established a prohibition on cluster munitions and provided strong provisions on victim assistance, also contributing to sparing innocent lives. At the same time, however, new challenges must also be considered in the current context, where the universalization of this instrument is advancing at a modest pace, and in which a State Party has even withdrawn from the Convention. The Holy See Delegation calls upon all States that are not yet members to promptly adhere and implement the Convention.

Mr. President,

The protection of civilians, the assistance of victims, and the prevention of further casualties were among the compelling reasons for the creation of this treaty. The Holy See therefore deplors the fact that cluster munitions, which have devastating long-term consequences for victims and land, continue to be produced, stockpiled, transferred and, even more concerning, used in armed conflicts. These weapons create wounds that damage the very fabric of life, harming not only individual persons and communities, but also their broader network of relationships with the whole human family.

Humanitarian disarmament treaties represent more than just legal obligations. They also represent moral commitments to present and future generations. Adherence

¹ Statement of the Holy See at the first meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, Vientiane, 9 November 2010.

to, respect for and promotion of international disarmament agreements are not signs of weakness. On the contrary, they provide a noble source of strength and a solemn responsibility for those who seek to safeguard human life, build peace and, in particular, defend the weakest and the many innocent people affected by the cruelty of conflicts and their deadly legacy.

The Holy See renews its call for 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’”.² This should indeed be “the disarming path of diplomacy”.³

Mr. President,

The Convention on Cluster Munitions places the human person at the center and is therefore a testament to the inextricable link between disarmament and development. In this regard, the disproportionately large share of human and economic resources allocated to armaments, with global military expenditure skyrocketing to over 2.89 trillion USD⁴ last year, is a serious imbalance when compared to the limited resources dedicated to meeting fundamental needs and promoting integral human development.

Mr. President,

My Delegation looks forward to working with you and the other Delegations to ensure that this Third Review Conference yields tangible and meaningful results in order to transform the deadly legacy and suffering caused by cluster munitions into a message of hope through concrete action for all the victims and for the development of the countries that are still affected by these deadly devices.

Thank you, Mr. President.

² Declaration of the Holy See upon Ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, 3 December 2008.

³ Pope Leo XIV, Message for the LIX World Day of Peace, 1st January 2026.

⁴ Cf. <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2026/global-military-spending-rise-continues-european-and-asian-expenditures-surge>.