



Strategic Dialogue on Universalization
Advancing Universalization of the Convention on Cluster Munitions:
Progress, Partnerships and Priorities for the Future
Maison de la Paix, Geneva,
26 June 2026

Report

Speakers: H.E. Ambassador Daovy Vongxay (President of the Third Review Conference) 3RC Presidency Lao People's Democratic Republic); H.E. Ambassador Julien Thöni (Switzerland), Mr Gustavo Corella Cordero (Universalization Co-coordination, Costa Rica), Mr Kristian Svanes (Universalization Co-coordinator, Norway), Ms Pamela Moraga (CCM ISU Director).

The Strategic Dialogue opened with welcoming remarks by Ambassador Daovy Vongxay, President of the Third Review Conference and Ambassador Julien Thöni of Switzerland who subsequently moderated the event.

Ambassador Vongxay opened the dialogue thanking Ambassador Thöni and conveyed the commitment to an inclusive, transparent and consensus-based process by the Presidency of the Third Review Conference (3RC) and their priorities, which resonates with universalization. For Ambassador Vongxay, universalization is not only expanding the membership but also spreading the norm, protecting civilians, and working toward an end to the suffering caused by cluster munitions. The Ambassador then continued by highlighting how recent reports of continued use of transfer of such weapons are evidence of the urgency of this agenda ahead of the Third Review Conference.

The Ambassador also reported on the 3RC Presidency's efforts in the field of universalization, including bilateral engagement and two regional workshops, in Vientiane, Lao PDR, for Southeast Asian and Pacific States, and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for African States, which brought together States Parties, signatories, States not party, and international, regional, and non-governmental organizations.

Ambassador Vongxay expressed the Presidency's gratitude towards those who made the workshops possible, including supporting States Parties and organizations. Such collaborations were highlighted as reflecting the breadth of engagement sustaining universalization efforts.

In closing, the Presidency expressed appreciation to the Universalization Co-Coordination, to Switzerland and Ambassador Julien Thöni for participating in the panel, to all participants, and to the Implementation Support Unit (CCM ISU) for its organizational support, expressing confidence in a productive and constructive discussion to follow.

Ambassador Thöni then provided an overview of the current status of universalization Convention.

The Dialogue then turned to presentations by the two Universalization Coordinators who shared the outcomes of the regional universalization workshops in Vientiane, Lao PDR (27-29 May) and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (4-5 June).

Asia Pacific Workshop in Vientiane

Mr. Gustavo Corella Cordero presented the main outcomes of the Asia Pacific Workshop held in Vientiane from 27 to 29 May 2026, hosted by Lao PDR, with the support of Australia, Canada, Ireland, and Switzerland. He highlighted key lessons on universalization and its close link with implementation.

The workshop pursued a set of interrelated objectives, including advancing universalization of the Convention, strengthening regional cooperation, sharing implementation experiences, supporting accession pathways, and linking humanitarian disarmament with sustainable development.

A key message emerging from the workshop was that universalization should be understood in connection with cooperation, prevention and implementation. It was emphasized that these ideas, taken together, concern only affected States but extend to prevention more broadly. The more States are party to the Convention, the wider the norm against cluster munitions is and it is less likely that cluster munitions are used, preventing all their impact on human lives and livelihood. Peer-to-peer activities remain important in this regard, as does recognizing that political will already exists in many contexts. Universalization is not solely about convincing States to join, but also about accompaniment in their process towards membership.

Mr. Corella noted that conversations with States do not always result in immediate commitments but nevertheless provide valuable insight into national priorities and constraints. Sustained engagement, both in Geneva and in the field was mentioned as essential to maintaining momentum and informing and future outreach. Field visits were highlighted as particularly valuable, as they demonstrate how political commitments are translated into practical implementation.

Among the practical outcomes identified were increased regional momentum, growing interest in accession among Pacific States, greater demand for legislative assistance, the renewed value of South-South cooperation, and the importance of approaching

universalization through a development perspective. Breakout discussions explored practical support measures, peer-to-peer cooperation, and legislative assistance while, on the margins of the workshop, bilateral engagements with Tonga, the Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste, focused on accession pathways and technical cooperation.

Mr. Corella also explained that the humanitarian argument remains compelling, but on its own it is no longer sufficient to drive universalization forward. Furthermore, technical assistance should be tailored to the specific capacity of each country, and sustained engagement is essential: maintaining an ongoing dialogue allows for the gradual building of relationships and trust with States. In particular, among Asia-Pacific States, the humanitarian rationale underlying the Convention is well understood; in this context, engagement strategies should remain flexible and tailored to national contexts.

The field visit to Kasi District illustrated how risk education, community engagement, survey and clearance operations demonstrate both the humanitarian and development value of mine action, while underscoring the importance of international cooperation in sustaining this work.

In concluding, Mr. Corella emphasized that universalization should not be measured solely by the number of States Parties to the Convention. It should equally be assessed by the strength of the humanitarian norm it embodies, and by the continued commitment of States Parties. He noted that, while political openness is growing, limited national capacities remain a key challenge. In his own words: universalization is not only about increasing membership, but also of strengthening humanitarian norms and the protection of civilians.

Africa Workshop in Addis Ababa

Mr. Kristian Svanes then presented the main outcomes of the Africa Regional Workshop on Universalization, held in Addis Ababa on 4-5 June 2026. The workshop was co-hosted by the Lao PDR and Cameroon, in collaboration with the ICRC, NPA, and the CCM ISU, with financial support from Canada, Norway, and Switzerland.

Mr. Svanes explained that Addis Ababa was selected because it hosts many African diplomatic missions, creating opportunities for sustained engagement beyond the workshop itself. The workshop brought together representatives from 27 African States, alongside the African Union, and other regional stakeholders, international organizations, civil society organizations, mine action operators and survivors' representatives.

Discussions centered on three main interconnected themes: universalization, implementation, and national legislation, while also highlighting the importance of partnerships across the Convention's implementation pillars. A recurring message was the importance of integrating the Convention into broader frameworks while strengthening engagement with regional and international organizations, mobilizing

resources for implementation, enhancing national ownership, coordination mechanisms, and technical cooperation.

Participants identified three practical priorities: strengthening advocacy, peer to peer engagement and regional diplomacy, including making use of the African Union, encouraging "champion States," and pursuing bilateral engagement with non-signatory States; reinforcing national implementation through strengthened legislative frameworks and reporting capacities and expanding international cooperation and assistance, including South-South cooperation, and stronger engagement with African Union frameworks.

One encouraging outcome reported during the workshop was that one State is progressing towards ratification in the near future.

In concluding, Mr. Svanes emphasized that a comprehensive approach is required to go forward: sustained country- specific engagement remains essential to advancing universalization. Workshops are an important catalyst, but meaningful progress depends on continued bilateral dialogue demonstrating the practical value of joining and implementing the Convention. The example of Lebanon, in the context of the APMBC, illustrates the value of this kind of long term, sustained engagement.

Mr. Svanes announced that a working paper is currently being developed to reflect on how universalization efforts should continue going forward, with a view to submitting it to the Review Conference.

From Regional Dialogue to Global Priorities

Drawing on the discussions held during the regional workshops, the Director of the CCM ISU, Ms. Pamela Moraga, reflected on the broader strategic implications for future universalization efforts. She observed that the exchanges with States not yet party, regional organizations, operators and civil society had reinforced several key lessons that could help shape universalization efforts during the next review cycle.

The CCM ISU Director emphasized that universalization is fundamentally a long-term process of sustained political engagement. While treaties are joint by governments, decisions are ultimately shaped by people, making trust, dialogue and personal relationships an essential foundation for progress. She noted that one of the most valuable outcomes of the regional workshops was the opportunity to strengthen a community of practices committed to reducing the humanitarian harm caused by cluster munitions forged during informal exchanges often proved as valuable as the formal discussions themselves.

Turning to the substance of universalization. Ms. Moraga underlined that it extends well beyond increasing the number of States Parties. In practice, universalization encompasses political dialogue, legal and technical assistance, confidence building,

regional cooperation, implementation support and sustained efforts to reinforce the humanitarian norm embodied in the Convention. She stressed – as previous speakers did – that progress should therefore be assessed not only by new accessions but also by the extent to which the Convention’s humanitarian principles continue to shape international behaviour, influence national policies, regional dialogue and international expectations even among non-states parties, the UN General Assembly’s resolution being one example of this broader socialization.

She further noted that recent regional engagement had reaffirmed that there is no single pathway to accession. Each State’s path to joining is shaped by its own legal, cultural, political, and institutional context, including national security and domestic considerations, requiring a dialogue that is responsive to national circumstances and grounded in careful listening. In this regard, she emphasized that universalization and implementation reinforce each other. Conversations on accession frequently evolved into discussions on implementation capacities, convention related obligations and financial cost implications and available technical support. States are more willing to join when they know implementation assistance will follow; the two processes are mutually dependent, not sequential.

The CCM ISU Director observed that universalization efforts are taking place in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. Recent use and transfers of cluster munitions, competing diplomatic priorities and evolving security considerations have reinforced the need for sustained political engagement and carefully tailored dialogue. She noted that in this environment, universalization is not only about expanding membership but also preserving and strengthening the humanitarian norm established by the Convention.

The Director also highlighted the importance of renewing the convention’s humanitarian narrative. As a new generation of diplomats and policy makers assumes responsibility for national decision making, many no longer have direct experience of the conflicts that led to the Convention’s adoption or of the humanitarian consequences of cluster munitions. She stressed the importance of preserving institutional memory and ensuring that future generations continue to understand both the humanitarian rationale and the practical value of the Convention.

Drawing on the experience of the two regional workshops, the Director emphasized the central role of regional leadership and regional ecosystems, which are a key lever. Peer-to-peer dialogue through regional platforms like ASEAN and the AU generates political momentum that’s difficult to replicate elsewhere. The workshops represented a strategic investment in these partnerships: Regional organizations and regional dialogue provide an important framework for building trust, demonstrating feasibility of implementation and generating political momentum. She expressed appreciation to the Presidency and the donor whose support had made these regional initiatives possible.

In concluding, The CCM ISU Director reflected on the broader legacy of the Convention and the Antipersonnel Mine ban Convention. Beyond their humanitarian achievements, she observed that both treaties have demonstrated a distinctive model of humanitarian multilateralism bringing together States, international organizations and civil society to develop ambitious legal instruments grounded in humanitarian principles. She suggested that this experience should provide confidence as States Parties look towards the next review cycle and continue to strengthen implementation, expand membership and ensure that the Convention's humanitarian purpose remains relevant for future generations.

The most encouraging takeaway is that there is little active opposition to the Convention, mainly a lack of awareness. With new generations of decision-makers emerging, every conversation and relationship helps keep doors open and carry the humanitarian purpose forward.

Q&A Session

During the Q&A session, questions on the role of youth in universalization, the importance of directing efforts to key States that are not party, and the significance of having the right people in the right rooms and meetings shaped the final part of the Strategic Dialogue.

Closing Remarks

In closing the event, the Lao PDR Presidency of the Third Review Conference, represented by Ambassador Vongxay, closed the event by thanking participants and highlighting four key messages: universalization remains central to the Convention's humanitarian effectiveness and credibility; regional and bilateral workshops (notably Vientiane and Addis Ababa, supported by Australia, Canada, Ireland, Norway, and Switzerland, with UNDP, ICRC, NPA and the ISU-CCM) are valuable platforms for advancing engagement; accession is shaped by practical, legal, and political considerations requiring sustained dialogue and targeted support; and the Third Review Conference offers a key opportunity to sustain momentum and set direction for the next review cycle. Finally, the Presidency reaffirmed its commitment to working inclusively with States Parties, signatories, States not yet party, and partners on universalization ahead of and beyond the 3RC.