

High-Level Segment – General Exchange of views

President, Excellencies, colleagues,

A norm matters most where its boundaries are contested: not where it is already accepted, but where it is resisted, weakened or does not yet apply.

Today, it is at these boundaries that the strength of the Convention on Cluster Munitions is being tested. It is being tested wherever cluster munitions continue to be used, when production and transfers are being reconsidered, where affected States are expected to meet their obligations without the resources needed to do so – and where, as a result, the suffering of civilian populations and individual civilians is unalleviated.

The Cluster Munition Monitor reported 1,063 casualties in 2025, 87% of whom were civilians. It is alarming that this represents a threefold increase from 2024, and even more so that numbers do not convey the full extent of civilian harm caused by cluster munitions. Alongside the stories of survivors, victims, and their families, are many more stories of opportunities missed, access denied, and communities left behind as a result of living with contamination.

In difficult times, commitment to humanitarian rules do not become less relevant. They become more necessary.

The Convention strengthens international humanitarian law because it turns the imperative to protect civilians into a clear preventive rule.

In 2025, affected States Parties released 114 square kilometres of hazardous land and destroyed almost 65,000 cluster munition remnants. This is meaningful progress that should be celebrated.

It is also clear evidence that this Convention makes a difference. Precisely because of the difference the Convention makes to the lives of millions of people, we must take seriously the pressures now confronting it.

New use is creating new contamination. Civilian casualties are rising. Funding reductions are disrupting operations. At the same time, affected communities continue to live with consequences of decisions made years—or generations—ago. For those communities, the Convention is not an abstract legal instrument. It is a commitment to address the harm already caused and to prevent that harm from being repeated.

That commitment must be reflected in the decisions about to be made at this review conference.

We thank Lao PDR for your leadership and hospitality. Holding this Review Conference in one of the countries most affected - where States Parties met for the first time 16 years ago - gives weight to the decisions before us.

Mr President,

The Political Declaration and the new Vientiane Capital Action Plan must respond honestly to the present moment and should reaffirm, without ambiguity, that every use of cluster munitions, by any actor and under any circumstances, must be condemned. It should reaffirm that their unacceptable humanitarian consequences outweigh any perceived military utility. And it should make clear that times of heightened tension and conflict are precisely when these norms matter the most.

Universalisation is central to that effort. MAG has been delighted to welcome Nigeria, South Sudan and Vanuatu to the Convention since the last Review Conference.

We must recognise that universalisation requires more than repeating the case for accession. MAG's engagement in many countries has shown the importance of understanding why States remain outside the Convention.

Those reasons may include security concerns, regional dynamics, domestic political processes, technical questions or uncertainty about the implications of accession. We should not begin with blanket assumptions. We should begin by listening.

The humanitarian consequences of cluster munitions must remain central to dialogue, while taking States' security concerns seriously. It must be sustained and grounded in national and regional realities.

Accession remains the objective. But practical steps can help build the pathway: participation in Convention meetings; voluntary transparency reporting; national policy reviews; technical exchanges; and regional and peer-to-peer cooperation.

For universalization efforts to progress, implementation must also remain credible. Several States Parties could fulfil their clearance obligations by the next Review Conference—but only if political leadership, safe access and adequate funding are secured. National ownership must therefore be matched by predictable, flexible and sustained international cooperation.

This Review Conference should therefore deliver three clear commitments.

Defend the norm, by condemning every use and resisting any erosion of the Convention.

Extend the norm, by understanding and addressing the barriers to accession.

Deliver the norm, by matching political promises with practical implementation and sustained resources.

The Convention has shown that international law can protect civilians. Our responsibility now is to ensure that it continues to do so—everywhere.

Thank you.