

Nonviolence International Southeast Asia
Statement on the Third Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions

Universalization and Protection of the Norm
Agenda item 9(a) - Universalization

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Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic

Statement delivered by Gene Gesite Jr, Humanitarian Disarmament Senior Fellow

President,

Universalization continues to be measured by the number of States Parties - that measure matters, yet a decolonial approach asks a further question: who carries the authority to define security and defend the norms when they come under pressure?

In Southeast Asia, several states remain outside the Convention even though they carry some of the world's most enduring legacies of bombing and unexploded submunitions. The communities that live with contamination should be protagonists in universalization, shaping the argument through regional history, local security realities, and experience of long-term harm, yet they are not given the moral, political, and practical authority.

Universalization should therefore move beyond outreach from a global center toward a reluctant periphery. It should strengthen regional constituencies of states, parliaments, armed forces, civil society, survivors, Indigenous Peoples, faith communities, women, and young people who can defend the norm in their own institutions and languages. South-South diplomatic and practitioner networks should help set strategies rather than serve mainly as channels for messages developed elsewhere.

The first withdrawal from this Convention is a profound warning. It exposes an unequal global order in which states may champion humanitarian rules in stable times and retreat when strategic pressure rises, while affected states are expected to carry permanent obligations. NISEA rejects this double standard. Sovereignty finds its strongest expression when it protects people from unacceptable harm.

States Parties should condemn every use of cluster munitions by any actor under any circumstances, respond to credible allegations, and support timely and transparent clarification. They should also engage non-state armed actors and other parties to conflict. Civilian protection cannot depend on the legal status or political alignment of the actor responsible.

Progress should be measured through accession, moratoria, national roadmaps, changes in military doctrine, stronger United Nations voting patterns, and domestic constituencies capable of resisting regression. We should also ask whether affected states and communities gained greater influence over the universalization agenda itself.

Redistributing power begins with recognizing where the norm's deepest legitimacy resides. From Vientiane, states and communities that know the human cost of cluster munitions should lead the call: these weapons have no place in our security, our arsenals, or our future.

Thank you.