

# Twenty-fifth Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

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Agenda item 10

Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)

## Report on improvised explosive devices\*

Submitted by the Coordinators<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

1. The Group of Experts of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) met in Geneva from 9 November to 10 November 2023 to discuss the issue of improvised explosive devices (IED), in accordance with the decisions taken at the Twenty-fourth Annual Conference of Amended Protocol II,<sup>2</sup> and at the 2023 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW.<sup>3</sup>
2. Building on the work undertaken by the Group of Experts on this issue since 2009, the discussions on improvised explosive devices were structured as follows:
  - i. General exchange of views;
  - ii. A panel discussion on new types of improvised explosive devices;
  - iii. A panel discussion on methods of clearance;
  - iv. A panel discussion on IED risk education and other methods to protect civilians;
  - v. Updates on relevant developments in other fora addressing the threat posed by IED;
  - vi. A panel discussion on national and regional responses.
3. In accordance with the decision of the Twenty-first Annual Conference to “recognize the importance of a balanced involvement of women and men in the Group of Experts in support of its efforts to address the threats posed by IED,”<sup>4</sup> the Coordinators actively engaged in efforts to achieve such balance in the composition of panels. As a result of these efforts, women made up over 33% of the panellists.

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\* The present report was submitted after the deadline owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Philippe Lejeune of France and Mr. Angel Horna of Peru.

<sup>2</sup> CCW/AP.II/CONF.24/5, paragraphs 33 and 34.

<sup>3</sup> CCW/MSP/2022/7, paragraph 37 (a).

<sup>4</sup> CCW/AP.II/CONF.23/6, paragraph 34 (g).



## **II. Conduct of the meeting (9 November to 10 November 2023)**

### **A. General exchange of views**

4. Representatives from States expressed their concerns over the proliferation and serious threats posed by IED, including their increased usage by non-state actors and criminal organizations. Delegations highlighted the severe humanitarian implications of IED, especially in urban and densely populated areas, and their negative effects on security, political stability and socio-economic development.

5. Several delegations stated that Amended Protocol II is a key instrument to deal with the threats posed by IED, and several delegations affirmed their commitment to the implementation of the Protocol.

6. Many delegations stressed the central importance of continued international and regional cooperation to address the issue of IED. Among the steps taken to further international cooperation and knowledge sharing on this issue were i) the convening of international seminars and workshops on counterterrorism and IED, ii) regional partnerships and the provision of specialized training courses for armed forces, law enforcement and other experts on IED, iii) partnerships with civil society and international organizations, and iv) contribution to and participation in international demining programs. Several delegations expressed their interest in offering training courses to representatives of interested High Contracting Parties.

7. Delegations provided examples of national measures taken to counter the threats posed by IED, including the establishment of national counter-IED strategies, standard operating procedures, projects and specialized units, as well as the development of risk education programs. Delegations also stressed the need to consider the gender impact of IED, ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in the development of new counter-IED technologies and programs.

### **B. Information exchange**

#### **1. The threat of improvised explosive devices and new types of improvised explosive devices**

8. Panellists from Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), the French Armed Forces, and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) provided insight on the challenges posed by new types of improvised explosive devices.

9. The panellists from the French Armed Forces discussed the French Army's involvement in humanitarian demining and the threats posed by IED. They emphasized that IED are easy to construct, as the raw materials required are readily available in local shops and instructions for their construction can be found on the internet, making them difficult to tackle. The speakers also shared information on how IED are made using homemade explosives with locally available materials and equipment. They highlighted that IED are commonly used due to their simplicity in production, transportation, and setup, as well as their cost-effectiveness. The speakers also emphasized the dangers posed by the use of drones in IED, as well as the use of mines and booby traps disguised in everyday objects such as toys. To overcome these threats, the speakers drew attention to different standards and strategies. They emphasized that the main objectives of these are to save the lives of civilians and deminers, preserve infrastructures and properties and neutralize the situation as soon as possible for civilians.

10. During the presentation by the representative of Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), a study on civilian casualty events from IED was presented. The study showed that between 2013 and 2022, there were 11,099 IED attacks in 93 countries, which resulted in 114,478 civilian casualties. The panellist also presented the numbers of civilian casualties from IED attacks in different contexts, such as in international and non-international armed conflicts and other situations of violence and terrorism. She emphasized that 50% of civilian casualties are due to non-specific IED. Suicide attacks, another type of IED, also cause significant harm

to the civilian population. Among the places where suicide attacks are carried out, places of worship, urban areas and public gatherings top the list. She also pointed out that most suicide attacks are carried out during weekends and in warmer temperatures.

11. Another panellist from AOAV added that from 2013 to 2022, 47% of a total of 245,841 civilian casualties in the last ten years were caused by IED attacks. This figure was higher than that of air-launched and ground-launched explosive weapons combined. The panellist also highlighted the trends in civilian casualties from IED attacks, which declined in recent years. However, he emphasized that the threat still exists and stressed that most victims of IED attacks are civilians. He also shared that the countries most affected by IED attacks from 2013 to 2022 were Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

12. The panellist from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) explained that IED are among the oldest types of weapons in the world. He noted that in conflict situations, warring parties may use IED if they fully comply with international humanitarian law, in particular the rules of distinction, proportionality, and precautionary measures in attacks. However, the unlawful use of IED, particularly by non-state armed groups and rogue individuals, has increased rapidly. Such IED attacks deliberately target clusters of civilians for maximum lethal effect, terror, and social disruption. He also pointed out that the spread of communications technologies has greatly abetted IED knowledge-sharing. Online, groups share instructional videos or materials, both on IED construction and on the execution of attacks. Travel for IED-related training among organizations is also occurring.

13. Following the panel, delegations exchanged their views and shared their experience of their countries in countering threats from IED. Delegations expressed concern about the spread use of IED by terrorists and illegal armed groups and called for the continued exchange of information, international cooperation and technical assistance in this area.

## **2. Methods of clearance of improvised explosive devices, focussing on urban environments**

14. Panellists from the Fondation Suisse de Deminage (FSD), the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in New York presented on current issues around methods of clearance of IED and related challenges. The panellist from FSD distinguished between IED clearance operations carried out by humanitarian non-governmental organizations on the one hand and military and law enforcement on the other, noting that the objectives between the two often differ. He highlighted the need to understand the operational environment, competencies of clearance troops, and the laws of the country in which clearance operations are carried out, and to adapt procedures accordingly. He underscored that understanding the background environment is the most fundamental factor in deciding which clearance methodology to employ. The panellist stressed the impact of IED on the civilian population and emphasized that protecting human life is the most important objective for those involved in clearance operations.

15. The panellist from GICHD stressed that IED are not a new threat, but that they are currently more in focus due to their increased usage and severe impact on the civilian population. He compared the traditional approaches to demining (including manual and animal-led demining operations) with new approaches, involving artificial intelligence and machine-learning, and highlighted the need for innovation in clearance methods and methodologies, due to the evolving and technologically developing nature of IED. The panellist cautioned, however, that decisions based in artificial intelligence are susceptible to inaccuracies, discriminatory outcomes, unconscious bias and malicious designed. As such, they must be carefully monitored by humans. The panellist concluded by noting that although field-based technological positions in IED clearance are still heavily male-dominated, there is progress being made in the inclusion of women in the field, and clearance operations must continue to benefit from gender and diversity-sensitive approaches.

16. The panellist from UNMAS focused on the threat to peacekeepers and non-governmental organizations posed by IED clearance, with a particular focus on the African region. He highlighted the importance of explosive hazard awareness training, appropriate leadership training of commanders, and arms search and detection training for specific

personnel of peacekeeping operations. He stressed some of the challenges experienced by peacekeeping missions in the field, including in Mali where there has been a high rate of explosive ordnance incidents and related fatalities. Among the challenges discussed were dense vegetation, restricted manoeuvrability on roads, lower visibility during movement, and restricted air support during night movement. The panellist noted that UNMAS has experienced success with employing an all arms approach with in-mission training, resulting in both an increased in the found and cleared rate of IED, and concluded his presentation by stressing the need for a diversified and comprehensive approach to mitigating IED threats.

17. After the panel discussion, delegations shared best practices regarding national clearance methods, which included the adoption of technical standards for countering IED, and clearance and demining operations carried out by specialised teams trained in explosives. Several delegations also highlighted the importance of modifying and refining national practices and standards in line with developing technologies. Delegations shared information on how they are working towards increased diversity, inclusivity and equal opportunity of genders in the development of counter-IED programs, with some confirming an increase in the number of women and minority representatives in IED clearance operations.

### **3. Protection of civilians: risk education and other methods**

18. Panellists from Colombia,<sup>5</sup> Humanity and Inclusion (HI), Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre (BHMIC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), participated in the discussion and agreed that risk education is a crucial step to mitigating risks related to IED.

19. During the panel discussion, the panellist from HI pointed out the impact of IED worldwide. From 2010 to 2022, 14,242 incidents involving IED were recorded, resulting in 147,482 civilian casualties (40,840 deaths, 106,642 injuries). She noted a decrease in incidents and civilian harm since 2013, with a significant drop in 2020, likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. She also pointed out that the IED accounted for 49% of all civilian casualties from the use of explosive weapons. She reported on the risk education methods that HI carries out in various contexts, including emergencies and open conflict, recovery and post-conflict, and in development contexts. The panellist illustrated the work of explosive ordnance risk education with an HI project in Iraq, where different methods were used, including traditional risk education, capacity building of affected communities and promoting behaviour change. She emphasized that alternative risk education methods are impactful because affected communities are informed about the risks posed by IED and other types of explosive devices and community cohesion is strengthened.

20. The panellist from the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre reported on the challenges and national experiences in mine risk education. She explained that the mine risk education program in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been improved over the years based on lessons learned. Mine risk education measures included the publication of information, warnings and contacts with local communities affected by mine and explosive devices. She also emphasized that the collection and analysis of gender and age-disaggregated data enables organizations that work on mine risk education to tailor their mine risk warning activities taking into account different risk exposures.

21. The panellist from ICRC explained the Risk Awareness and Safer Behaviour methodology which the organization uses to improve people's resilience to weapon-contamination hazards through behaviour change. The speaker emphasized the importance of partnering with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society in the affected countries, which allows the ICRC to access areas that may be difficult to reach otherwise. To ensure effective risk education, he suggested that the messaging must be tailored to the target audience. Additionally, the ICRC has established communication with two-thirds of 450 non-

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<sup>5</sup> Owing to technical difficulties with the interpretation of this presentation, it was not delivered fully during the meeting, but is available on the webpage of the meeting at following link: <https://meetings.unoda.org/ccw-apii-gx/convention-on-certain-conventional-weapons-amended-protocol-ii-group-of-experts-2023>.

state armed groups recognized by the organization, which helps in spreading the message to protect civilians.

22. The panellist from UNICEF laid out the legal framework that guides the work of the organization. These frameworks take into account IHL instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and other key conventions. In addition to those frameworks, the organization used the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action to guide its work on humanitarian issues, including in relation to the IED threat.

23. Another panellist from UNICEF discussed the Children and Armed Conflict Agenda and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children. The speaker emphasized the importance of considering the human rights perspective in all actions and highlighted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is a powerful tool that should be used, such as in cases where an IED has harmed a child. She also stressed that the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action is a practical framework that is relevant to all stakeholders, not just UNICEF, as it provides guidance on how to address risk education, victim assistance, advocacy, and injury surveillance.

24. Following the panel discussion, delegations shared their practices on awareness campaigns on IED threats and highlighted that risk education is a key element to reducing the IED risk.

#### **4. Updates on relevant developments in other fora addressing the threat posed by IED<sup>6</sup>**

25. Panellists from the World Customs Organization (WCO), the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED) delivered presentations on counter-IED efforts in other fora. The panellist from WCO introduced the WCO's Programme Global Shield (PGS), and shared information and best practices on preventing terrorists and criminal organizations from accessing precursor chemicals. He emphasized the importance of PGS's partnership with international organizations and customs bodies, including Interpol, Europol, UNIDIR, UNODA, UNCTED, DTRA and RILO, as well as local partnerships with police and other law enforcement, which typically take over the criminal investigation that follows any seizure of shipments. The panellist noted that in addition to focusing its work on seizing the thirteen most common IED precursor chemicals, PGS also monitors shipments of drones and other devices that can be used to deploy IED.

26. The panellist from UNODA introduced the new Global Framework, developed by the open-ended working group on conventional ammunition established by General Assembly resolution 76/233 and adopted through resolution A/C.1/78/L.41 by the General Assembly's First Committee. She explained that the Global framework is voluntary and contains a set of political commitments for strengthening and promoting existing initiatives on, and addressing existing gaps in, through-life conventional ammunition management. It includes the promotion of sustainability, international and regional cooperation, security and safety, gender mainstreaming, and the full, equal, meaningful and effective participation of women in through-life conventional ammunition management.

27. The panellist from UNCTED highlighted the link between counterterrorism and IED. She discussed best practices in preventing terrorists from gaining access to weapons by stopping the trafficking of IED and seizing IED and IED components, and in this regard she noted the relevance of, inter alia, UN Security Council resolutions 2370 (2017) and 2482 (2019), as well as of the 2015 Madrid Guiding Principles to stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and its 2018 Addendum. She noted the development of sophisticated methods to smuggle IED components internationally, and highlighted that the work of UNCTED, in the context of its international counter-terrorism agenda, is dependent on State frameworks and domestic mechanisms to operate efficiently. All three panellists highlighted the importance

<sup>6</sup> In accordance with paragraph 33 (e) of the final document of the Twenty-fourth Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties (CCW/AP.II/CONF.24/5).

of international and regional cooperation to combat sophisticated methods of developing and smuggling IED components.

28. After the panel presentations, several delegations explained how they are contributing to gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women in demining efforts, including through partnering with local communities in which IED clearance activities are carried out, and asking women in such communities what role within the IED clearance operations they would be comfortable playing. This has contributed to the empowerment of women while acknowledging local norms.

## **5. National and regional responses**

29. Representatives from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Small Arms Survey (SAS), Conflict Armament Research (CAR), Nonviolence International Southeast Asia (NISA) and expert from Peru<sup>7</sup> discussed the development and consolidation of coherent and coordinated national and regional responses to counter the threat posed by IED.

30. The panellist from UNIDIR gave an overview of the UNIDIR Capability Maturity Model and Self-Assessment Tool for Countering Improvised Explosive Devices, also known as C-IED CMM and SAT, which assists States in identifying gaps and challenges in national regulations and preparedness to deal with IED. The tool assesses national counter-IED efforts by looking at different components such as national policy and legislation regarding IED, security and control of explosives, risk education programs and development of counter-IED capabilities. The panellist also highlighted how the tool was used in at the regional level by providing examples of the partnership with several Southeast Asian States through collaboration with Non-Violence International Southeast Asia (NISA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

31. The panellist from the Small Arms Survey (SAS) shared his first-hand experiences and insights into countering IED threats across various regions, highlighting the necessity to shift from a device-centric approach to understanding and degrading the entire IED system. He highlighted the strategic elements in countering IED threats, including prevention, information exchange, capacity development, governance support, and cross-border collaboration. He also stressed the importance of information sharing among stakeholders, which enables effectiveness in countering IED. He encouraged the use of the UNIDIR capability maturity model self-assessment tool for assessing and improving C-IED capabilities at the national level and the development of a coherent strategy for cooperation in C-IED at the international level.

32. The panellist from Conflict Armament Research (CAR) shared the findings of the recent study regarding tracing IED-related materials, such as electronic components and explosives, in conflict zones. He explained the notable seizures of IED-related materials and their transfer routes. He also pointed out various challenges regarding the tracing of diverted materials and the identification of companies involved in suspicious activities. In order to counter the IED threat, he suggested utilizing available and commercial data to identify unusual trends and sharing this information for informed decision-making in the transfer of materials.

33. The panellist from Non-violence International Southeast Asia (NISEA) highlighted the collaboration with INTERPOL National Central Bureau Bangkok, the Royal Thai Police, NISEA and the UNIDIR Conventional Arms and Ammunition Programme in Bangkok to improve counter-IED preparedness and response in Southeast Asia. Several countries in the region have developed counter-IED measures as part of their national security strategies. The speaker explained that NISEA supported countries in building national capacities such as contact points, task forces and crisis management mechanisms in times of heightened risk.

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In addition, initiatives were being implemented to raise awareness and educate law enforcement agencies, government agencies and affected communities.

34. Following the panel discussion, delegations shared their national experience in combating IED both at the national and international levels. Several delegations shared their challenges in dealing with IED used by non-state armed groups. Speakers also reiterated the readiness to provide technical assistance to other countries. One delegation shared a video of a visit conducted by 20 military units from different countries to an engineering training centre of the army. The visit included demonstrations of equipment for explosive destruction, road cleaning after IED detonation, and landscaping. The goal was to showcase the centre's infrastructure capabilities and explore collaboration opportunities, military exchange, and training among countries.

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