Meeting of the High Contracting Parties 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

14 November 2024

English only

Geneva, 13-15 November 2024
Agenda item 7
General exchange of views

Working Paper*

Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

I. Introduction

1. The CCW remains a crucial forum for states with diverse military and humanitarian objectives and we encourage all States not yet party to accede without delay.

2. Events since last year's meeting of High Contracting Parties continue to demonstrate why the CCW is an important part of the international disarmament architecture. The wanton and often indiscriminate use of weapons regulated or prohibited by the CCW and its Protocols continues unabated in conflicts across almost all regions of the world. We remain deeply concerned by the Russian Federation's continued illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. Recent reports have suggested the use of air-dropped mines and IEDs from unmanned aerial vehicles in civilian areas which continue to add to existing questions about compliance with the CCW and its Protocols. Since last year's meeting of High Contracting Parties the situation in the Middle East has also deteriorated further: the death and destruction in Gaza is intolerable – as is the fact that hostage remain there – and the situation in Lebanon, with continued civilian casualties and destruction is getting worse. An immediate ceasefire must be agreed by Israel with Hamas in Gaza and Hizballah in Lebanon. All High Contracting Parties must fulfil their commitments, and all States must continue to abide by international law in their conduct, including international humanitarian law.

II. Amended Protocol II

3. Improvised Explosive Devices continue to devastate the lives of civilians, and we are pleased to see time in the schedule dedicated to this issue one again. We thank Colonel Philippe Lejeune of France and Mr. Angel Horna of Peru for their work as IED coordinators this year. IEDs pose a serious global threat, resulting in widespread civilian death and life-changing injury, and generally reducing the life quality of civilians and disrupting the critical services otherwise offered to them. Nearly half of all explosive ordnance casualties in 2023 globally were caused by IEDs and over two thirds of casualties were civilians, underlining the devastating impact of IEDs on humanitarian efforts and sustainable development. We must consider responses to the IED threat alongside more traditionally manufactured explosive ordnance, from both a humanitarian and military perspective. Efforts to understand and tackle the IED threat should not be taken in isolation – there are clear interdependencies

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

Please recycle

to the work of the Ottawa Treaty and the consideration of novel and craft manufacturing techniques within the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

4. The Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management is also of significant relevance here. The UK co-sponsored the First Committee resolution both in 2023 and 2024. The Global Framework will provide an important complement to our work on APII and we look forward to the multilateral process for the Framework beginning next year, as we look to promote its implementation and synergies with APII and related instruments

5. While the Ottawa Treaty sets higher standards to which all states should be aiming, APII's requirements provide an important threshold in this area, for example in terms of standards on marking and record-keeping. We will continue to advocate for states to join both the Ottawa Treaty and become High Contracting Parties to the Protocol, and to implement both. Effective implementation is essential to limit civilian harm and ensure subsequent clearance can be achieved. We therefore remain deeply concerned by reports that indicate potential breaches of the Protocol by High Contracting Parties over the past year. We call on all High Contracting Parties to comply with the Protocol, and for all states to abide by International Humanitarian Law in their conduct.

III. Protocol III

6. The UK continues to regret that Protocol III issues remain absent from the CCW agenda because of the opposition of a single High Contracting Party and echo others' calls to conduct informal consultations on Protocol III during the intersessional period, and for a specific item on Protocol III to feature on the agenda for our meeting next year. While the UK may not agree with all perspectives, many High Contracting Parties feel there are areas to discuss relevant to Protocol III and as the CCW is the sole forum with incendiary weapons within its direct scope; it undermines the CCW if this cannot happen.

IV. Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems

7. Discussions in the GGE on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems this year under the new strengthened mandate have been constructive and detailed and it is important that the GGE maintains that momentum particularly on key issues such as characterisation and application of International Humanitarian Law. The new mandate provides the GGE with the clear opportunity to make meaningful progress with a view to delivering the results that the international community is expecting. It sets us a definite goal to achieve and allows good time in which to do so. The UK continues to stand ready to work constructively and proactively in fulfilling the mandate of the GGE.

V. Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas

8. It has been two years since the UK, along with many other states, endorsed the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences arising from the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. Unfortunately, events since then have only underscored the need to take steps to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The UK has continued to use our knowledge and expertise to share good practice, learn from others and strengthen cooperation to support the implementation of its commitments. We were proud to participate in the Oslo Conference which was successful in taking stock of implementation and sharing expertise, and we look forward to participating in the second review conference hosted by Costa Rica. We urge all actors to abide by the EWIPA declaration and urge all states to commit themselves to it.

VI. Protocol V

9. We were pleased that the UK's ratification of Protocol V took effect as of 13th of November 2024. After a lengthy period in which the UK has aligned operational practice with the Protocol, the UK is now fully bound by its obligations and remains committed to responsible action on ERW. This is an important step for the UK in supporting other states in reducing the long-term effects of conflict, especially on the worst affected civilian populations. We are proud to be the 98th High Contracting Party and hope our ratification can lead to further progress over the next year towards the Protocol's universalisation.

VII. Conclusion

10. We remain committed to the CCW and its Protocols. We therefore regret the continued attempt by one High Contracting Party to deny observers the ability to fully participate in the deliberations of this year's Meetings of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which has once again dominated our proceedings. The principles of inclusivity, transparency and openness are crucial to our work and we continue to support the full participation of observers in our meetings.