



International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

**17th Annual Conference of the High-Contracting Parties to Protocol V of the
Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons**

13 November 2023

Statement for delivery under the General Debate

Mr President,

In many parts of the world, [across all geographic regions](#), explosive remnants of war (ERW) litter landscapes that are no longer battlefields, and continue to kill and maim thousands long after active hostilities have ended. A large proportion of victims, [year after year](#), are children.

[While hostilities are ongoing](#), ERW impede access to healthcare facilities and other essential services, [prevent the proper operation and maintenance of critical infrastructure](#), block transportation and escape routes, and hinder the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance. [In the aftermath of armed conflicts, unexploded ordnance \(UXO\) continue to](#) hamper agriculture and trade, delay reconstruction efforts, and prevent the return of displaced persons. Weapon contamination poses a long-term obstacle to socio-economic development.

The use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas, [especially cities and other urban centres](#), multiplies the human cost, [because the number of direct and indirect victims in such environments is higher and the difficulty of clearing UXO is much greater](#). Recent and ongoing conflicts, be it in the Middle East, Africa, the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, or elsewhere, are clear examples.

The ICRC calls on all States and parties to armed conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with a wide impact area in populated areas, [due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects](#). The landmark Dublin Political Declaration [on explosive weapons in populated areas](#), which 83 States have so far endorsed, marks significant progress in this respect. We encourage all States to endorse it and to implement it fully and effectively. [This can go a long way in preventing the occurrence of UXO and, consequently, future victims](#).

[The presence of abandoned explosive ordnance \(AXO\) also poses grave, albeit less imminent, threats. AXO are often poorly stored and lack proper maintenance, making them susceptible to malfunctions](#)

and random explosions, putting the life of civilians in the vicinity at risk. Their unregulated availability risks prolonging armed conflicts or fueling instability and armed violence.

Mr President,

Only approximately half of the world's States are party to Protocol V, and the rate of its universalization has stalled alarmingly in recent years. We urge all States that are not yet party to adhere to Protocol V and all States parties to faithfully implement their obligations, [as this can significantly reduce the deadly threat posed by ERW around the world](#). In this respect, we welcome your working paper on universalization and the recommendations contained therein, as well as the very helpful analysis of different obstacles to accession. In the past year we have discussed and promoted the CCW and its Protocols, including Protocol V, with States bilaterally and at regional fora in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. [The ICRC, along with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, will continue to work tirelessly to expand the membership of this important instrument.](#)

[We call on States to double their efforts to mark, clear, remove and destroy ERW, and to take all other feasible measures to prevent and reduce the harm they cause, including through risk awareness and education activities.](#)

[Recording, retaining and transmitting information on the use or abandonment of explosive ordnance is critical to enable these efforts, as are generic preventive measures and measures to ensure the safe and secure management of ammunition stockpiles.](#)

[Protocol V further establishes the collective responsibility of States to provide assistance to affected States and to the victims of ERW. In this respect, we welcomed the informal open consultations on Protocol V and the focus of the thematic panel on victim assistance. We urge States to take all necessary measures to implement these obligations and to report on them at the annual Protocol V meetings.](#)

[Every year, the ICRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies continue to treat thousands of new victims of these weapons that keep on killing. We undertake specific initiatives to prevent and address the effects of ERW, including clearance, awareness-raising, physical rehabilitation, and support for the social and economic inclusion of survivors, as well as capacity-building for National Societies.](#)

[In 2022, ICRC, often in partnership with the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society, carried out risk awareness activities for communities and helped manage mine-action initiatives, including ERW survey in several contexts.](#) This included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Myanmar, Nagorno-Karabakh, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ukraine, Senegal, Syria, and Yemen.

[Over the past 40 years, the ICRC's Physical Rehabilitation Programme has supported nearly two million people with disabilities, including survivors of ERW, in more than 50 countries around the world. We](#)

can further offer its services as a neutral intermediary to facilitate transmission of the information recorded on the use or abandonment of explosive munitions from the party that has used or abandoned them to the party that controls the affected area.

Our Advisory Service and Delegations stand ready to assist States in joining and implementing the Protocol. Earlier this year, we also published a detailed briefing note¹ on ERW and Protocol V, which we encourage you to consult on our website.

We look forward to a productive meeting.

Thank you.

¹ Preventing and eradicating the deadly legacy of explosive remnants of war, ICRC, March 2023, available at <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4694-preventing-and-eradicating-deadly-legacy-explosive-remnants-war>.