

Joint Statement by Canada, Australia, and New Zealand on International Humanitarian Law in the context of Cluster 4 (Conventional Weapons) of the First Committee of the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly

Time Limit: 4 minutes

Thank you, Chair.

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are deeply concerned by the rising casualty figures we are seeing from conflicts around the world. In 2024, civilian deaths in conflict surged by 40%, with a civilian death every 12 minutes. Conflict, worldwide, is driving unacceptable suffering and indiscriminate harm, with long-term humanitarian, economic, and social consequences.

In Myanmar, in the 14 months leading up to 31 May 2025, nearly half of all civilian deaths were reported to have been the result of direct military aerial attacks. All 14 states in Myanmar are reported to be contaminated by anti-personnel landmines.

In South Sudan, improvised incendiary weapons are being dropped from the air.

In Ukraine, unexploded ordnance contamination now renders unusable approximately 10 per cent of the world's most fertile agricultural land.

In Gaza, the deployment of explosive weapons in densely populated areas has caused untold humanitarian harm.

These are only four examples from the over 130 ongoing armed conflicts recorded by the ICRC.

Chair, international humanitarian law is the legal foundation for alleviating this human suffering in conflict. With IHL as our framework, the international community has developed tools and norms to protect civilians during armed conflict. These tools support government, militaries, non-state actors, communities, and civil societies to understand and implement IHL.

For example, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Convention on Cluster Munitions serve to ban or limit certain means and methods of warfare. These humanitarian disarmament Conventions have been highly successful, protecting civilians, reducing human suffering, safeguarding communities, and returning hundreds of square kilometres of land to productive uses each year. But this progress is under threat. As conflicts increase, we reaffirm our commitment to these Conventions' full application, particularly in conflict, and we urge all States to do the same, as well as refrain from actions that might harm the norms they underpin.

Additionally, the Arms Trade Treaty recognises the humanitarian consequences of the illicit and unregulated trade in conventional arms, and provides a framework to regulate the arms trade in support of IHL.

We call on all states to vote in favour of the resolutions supporting these instruments.

We have also led on and joined political initiatives which highlight international law, including the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel, the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas, and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Adherence to and implementation of these international instruments is a demonstration of our commitment to IHL and the rules-based system. For CANZ, this is reflected in our statements, in military doctrine, and in our international development partnerships.

For example, recognizing the differentiated impacts of explosive ordnance on women, girls, men, and boys, we support and promote gender-sensitive risk education programmes. These initiatives are vital for empowering affected communities, reducing casualties, and fostering resilience.

Finally, we commend the ICRC for the Global Initiative to Galvanise Political Commitment to IHL. We encourage all States to engage constructively with this initiative and to support the ICRC's broader efforts to promote respect for IHL.

In closing, CANZ reiterates that the protection of civilians must remain at the heart of our collective action. Upholding IHL is not only a legal obligation but a moral imperative.

Thank you.

(538 words)

