



Ban Advocates

General Statement to the CCW Fourth Review Conference

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Governments are here this week negotiating what is permissible or not, in the context of cluster munitions. But one has to ask how can the use of a weapon that fails to differentiate between civilians and military targets be permissible? And how can any weapon that leaves so many remnants for decades after a conflict has ended be permissible?

Is it permissible for Raed's son Ahmad to have died in his arms on his fifth birthday for simply playing with a bright, shiny object that turned out to be a cluster munition remnant in south Lebanon?

Is it permissible that Thoummy lost his arm to a cluster munition as a child while collecting bamboo for his family in a village in Laos?

Raed, Thoummy and myself are part of a group of survivors who have suffered loss from the effect of cluster munitions. We have a voice as part of a global team of 'Ban Advocates' supported by Handicap International.

I'd like to tell you about my son.

As a US Marine, Travis and his comrades aimed for the highest standard - a gold standard you might say - in their mission to defend the country they had faith in. I was proud of my son and I forever will be. Yet now as I try to reconcile what has happened, and while Travis' comrades try to come to terms with their situation too, I find it impossible to agree with the country Travis and his comrades fought so hard for when it is pressing so hard to promote ongoing use of a weapon that not only killed my son as he cleared remnants of war, but has killed so many civilians too.

The weapon in question, the M26, is banned under the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions – a treaty that we have heard in the last two days *is* a gold standard, a gold standard in International Humanitarian Law.

It is equally hard to accept the contradiction that countries (including Germany, France, the UK, Netherlands, Italy and more) are currently destroying their M26 stockpiles on humanitarian grounds, yet through current CCW negotiations are giving the green light for future use of this weapon by countries unwilling to admit that these weapons are simply not acceptable on any grounds.

For those that have followed negotiations on cluster munitions within the CCW since we last met at the 3rd Review Conference - or even longer if you were involved during the decade since these discussions began - you might remember how and why we got to this point. We started off with the mandate to address the urgent humanitarian problem caused by cluster bombs. We continued for many years, unable to come to a consensus, while countries continued to claim that preventable civilian deaths are somehow acceptable if balanced against military ambitions. And now we find ourselves asking, after years of debate, financial investment and further lives lost - when did we forget that the *reason* we are here is because we all agree cluster munitions cause unacceptable harm.

During the next two weeks we will hear accusations that defending the comprehensive ban on cluster munitions means a lack of a constructive approach. But how constructive is blighting a post-conflict community with the economic and humanitarian burden of unexploded remnants of war?

During the next two weeks we will also hear debate on technical issues, like supposed failure rates and self-destruct mechanisms.

And during the next two weeks we will hear defense of the arbitrary 1980 cut-off date for weapons permissible under this draft protocol, and the lengthy twelve-year transition period – all in the name of compromise. But how can we compromise when it comes to a human life?

I ask you please do not compromise on human lives and remember to hold firm to our gold standard.