

Intervention by the International Humanitarian Law and Youth Initiative (IHLI) Under Agenda Item 3: Matters Related to the Mandate of the Committee on Victim Assistance

Mr. President,

On behalf of the **International Humanitarian Law and Youth Initiative (IHLI)**, it is an honor to take the floor today. Our initiative is a youth-driven movement founded in 2018 by a group of young professionals from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Global South. We work to promote awareness and advocacy of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) through a digital space that enables youth to learn, engage, and collaborate on related issues. Most members of our initiative come from regions affected by armed conflict, which places us in a unique position—as witnesses, documenters, and advocates for civilian rights and for building a culture of law and peace.

Mr. President,

Today, I bring to you the voices of young people living under the daily reality of conflict, as part of our advocacy under the theme: **"For the Future Generations"** In **Gaza**, our colleague *Mai*—a committed member of IHLI who lives and works directly with victims in the Strip—continues her efforts despite the immense security and humanitarian challenges. Although Gaza does not contain traditional minefields like those found in other contexts, civilians—particularly children and women—face a **daily threat from ground-placed improvised explosive devices (IEDs)**. These IEDs cause consequences equivalent to anti-personnel mines, including limb loss, permanent disability, and severe psychological trauma. Efforts to conduct survey and clearance operations in Gaza are obstructed by **significant field and political challenges**, notably due to ongoing occupation, frequent bombardments, devastated infrastructure, and the blockade, which prevents the entry of demining equipment and international survey teams.

Mai has worked tirelessly to **raise community awareness** about the dangers of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), and to **document violations** involving these weapons. She has recorded cases of explosives planted in **food containers and agricultural land**, putting civilians in grave danger. The repeated breakdowns of ceasefires have further escalated the conflict and disrupted her hopes—and those of many—for rebuilding Gaza and ensuring civilian safety.

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Gaza's health system is collapsing. Testimonies collected by our initiative point to a **sharp rise in amputation cases**, a **severe lack of post-injury rehabilitation services**, and major barriers preventing victims from reaching medical facilities, due to the blockade and attacks on civilian areas.

Security restrictions and ongoing violence hinder technical survey and clearance operations, as well as field documentation, leaving civilians in a **state of constant vulnerability**. These conditions pose a **serious challenge to the implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention**, especially **Article 6** concerning **victim assistance**.

We stress the **urgent need for unconditional international intervention** to ensure the entry of humanitarian and medical assistance into Gaza and the establishment of mental health and rehabilitation programs. Additionally, repeated targeting of humanitarian and medical personnel and the absence of safe humanitarian corridors **undermine the core principles of IHL** and put more lives at risk.

In Sudan, the situation is equally alarming. The threat is no longer limited to warfare. **Landmines and explosive remnants of war have become a daily nightmare**, particularly in areas that saw heavy fighting. Farmers, children, and returnees are all at risk of stepping on these lethal traps, which **do not distinguish between a passing foot and an armed combatant**.

As our colleague *Ahmed* from Sudan reported, there is an **increasing spread of mines in residential neighborhoods and on roads**, along with heartbreaking scenes of victims losing limbs or families mourning loved ones lost in sudden explosions. These images have shocked public opinion and exposed the scale of the **invisible catastrophe** threatening thousands of lives—even after active fighting ends.

Towns and villages that once offered shelter to civilians have now become **open fields of death**, with **no adequate surveying equipment**, **no functional clearance plans**, and **no structured programs for trauma care or victim rehabilitation**.

In light of this, and in the spirit of protecting our future, we make the following recommendations:

1. **Broaden the scope of Article 6** to include victims of IEDs directed against individuals, given their effects are equivalent to those caused by anti-personnel mines.
2. **Enhance community-based risk education**, especially targeting children and farmers. Mai, for instance, voluntarily conducts awareness sessions despite security risks. These

youth actors must be supported with training and resources to become part of protection and victim assistance efforts.

3. **Ensure the unconditional entry of medical and humanitarian assistance** into Gaza and Sudan, and invest in sustainable rehabilitation and psychosocial support services to meet the basic needs and rights of the victims.
4. **Urge Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to reconsider any intentions to withdraw from the Convention.** At a time when the international community should be rallying to protect civilians and ease suffering, retreating from this collective responsibility sends the wrong message.

Mr. President,

We hope these appeals will receive your serious attention and that the obligations under the Convention will be **translated into tangible support for victims and affected communities**—for a safer, more just, and more humane future.

Thank you.