FACT SHEET

CONVENTION ON CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

The Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions of the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects entered into force in 1983. It is more commonly known as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). The CCW is a key instrument of the international humanitarian law seeking to ban or restrict the use of specific types of weapons that have indiscriminate effects on civilians or cause unnecessary suffering for combatants.

The structure of the CCW regime

To ensure flexibility in dealing with new developments in armed conflicts and weapon technologies, the CCW is a framework convention that sets out the rules on joining the regime as well as to possibly negotiate and adopt new protocols. Currently, five Protocols set out specific prohibitions, restrictions and other provisions on certain types of weapons.

An amendment to Article 1 of the Convention regarding the scope of application of the Convention and its Protocols was decided in 2011. By joining the amendment to Article 1 of the Convention, High Contracting Parties will ensure that the CCW and its Protocols apply to situations of non-international armed conflicts.

Meeting of the GGE on LAWS in August 2018 (© UN Geneva)

The CCW’s Protocols

When joining the CCW, High Contracting Parties must join at least two of its five Protocols:

- **Protocol I – Non-detectable Fragments**: Prohibits the use of any weapon designed to injure by fragments which cannot be detected in the human body by X-rays.
- **Amended Protocol II – Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices**: Prohibits the use of non-detectable anti-personnel mines and their transfer, and prohibits the use of non-self-destructing and non-self-deactivating mines outside fenced, monitored and marked areas. Seeks to limit the indiscriminate damage caused by landmines and requires High Contracting Parties to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians when using these weapons.
- **Protocol III – Incendiary Weapons**: Prohibits the use of weapons primarily designed to set fire to objects or cause burn injuries against civilians.
- **Protocol IV – Blinding Laser Weapons**: Prohibits the use and transfer of laser weapons designed to cause permanent blindness.

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• **Protocol V – Explosive Remnants of War (ERW):** Prevents and minimises the humanitarian impact of unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive weapons. Includes provisions on clearance and destruction of ERW, measures for the protection of civilians, recording the use of explosive ordnance, international cooperation and assistance, and victim assistance.

“As a framework agreement, the CCW has served as a flexible platform for the progressive elaboration of limits on the means and methods of warfare, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The value and relevance of the CCW is not only reflected in the specific restrictions contained in its protocols. It is also reflected in the ability of the High Contracting Parties to pursue timely and dynamic discussions on new weapons.”

Remarks of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to the CCW Meeting of the High Contracting Parties 2018

**Emerging issues**

A unique and important character of the CCW is its ability to address emerging issues and the possibility for negotiating new protocols. For example, since 2016 the CCW High Contracting Parties are examining possible challenges posed by emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) through a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). (For further information see Fact Sheet on Autonomous Weapons Systems).

**Facts on the CCW and its Protocols**

- As of 1 July 2019, 125 States have ratified or acceded to the CCW. Four States have signed but not yet ratified the Convention. There are 118 States parties to Protocol I, 105 to Amended Protocol II, 115 to Protocol III, 108 to Protocol IV and 95 to Protocol V.

- The CCW is one of the very few instruments of international humanitarian law which seeks to regulate the conduct of hostilities of all parties to the conflict, including non-state actors.

- The CCW regime is characterized by a strong engagement from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society.

- The adoption of Protocol IV on Blinding Laser Weapons in 1995 is an example of a weapons system being pre-emptively banned before it was developed or used.

- Protocol V on ERW is the first multilateral agreement to deal with the challenges posed by unexploded and abandoned ordnance. States’ adherence and implementation of Protocol V could significantly reduce the number of civilians killed or injured by ERW during and after conflicts.

- The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has increased dramatically. States Parties to Amended Protocol II have been discussing how to address the humanitarian impact of the use of IEDs.

- The Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW will be held on 13-15 November 2019 under the chairmanship of Pakistan.

For more information: [http://www.unog.ch/ccw](http://www.unog.ch/ccw) e-mail: ccw@un.org

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