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.

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.
• **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.

**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). In 2018 and 2019, the Group identified and adopted eleven principles to guide future work of the Group, reaffirming the relevance of international humanitarian law to such technologies. (For further information see Fact Sheet on Autonomous Weapons Systems).

At the 2019 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, stressed that the Convention and its Protocols remained key instruments of international humanitarian law. She also noted that the diversity of issues discussed under the CCW was a clear indicator that the Convention serves as a dynamic and evolving framework that brings together key stakeholders.

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**Facts**

- As of 1 January 2020, 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, 106 to Amended Protocol II, 115 to Protocol III, 109 to Protocol IV and 96 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, adopted in 2003, 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 11-13 November 2020 under the chairmanship of the Netherlands.

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