

PRESS RELEASE

Philippine Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva

14-16 Allée David-Morse, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland • Telephone No. +41 22 716 1930 • <http://www.genevapm.dfa.gov.ph>

E-mail: geneva.pm@dfa.gov.ph • Facebook: Philippine Consulate General, Geneva URL: <https://www.facebook.com/genevapcg/>



Bangsamoro takes center stage at UN experts' meeting on explosive remnants of war



Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative Maria Teresa T. Almojuela (third from left) giving the synthesis for the CCW side event hosted by the Philippine and Spanish Missions, along with (L-R) Ms. Mitzi Austero, NISEA Programs Manager, Spanish Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative Ignacio Sanchez de Lerin, and Mr. Alfredo Lubang, PCBL National Coordinator.

Geneva, 22 July 2022 – Philippine civil society experts briefed diplomats here on how best practices in the Bangsamoro promote the humanitarian norms of the U.N. Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), a landmark treaty that seeks to limit warfare by balancing security considerations with humanitarian protection.

The CCW is an umbrella treaty composed of five protocols, each dealing with prohibition or regulation of specific weapons. Two of these protocols – Amended Protocol II on mines, booby traps, and other explosive devices, and Protocol V on explosive remnants of war (ERW) – provide for regular Group of Experts (GOE) meetings where states parties exchange views on how best to implement the agreements.

At the GOE meeting held on 20-22 July in Geneva, the Philippines announced that it has ratified Protocol V in April this year, completing the country's formal adherence to all CCW protocols. The protocol will take effect in the country in November.

Spanish Ambassador Ignacio Sanchez de Lerin, President-designate of the Annual Conference of High Contracting Parties to CCW Protocol V, joined other GOE delegations in welcoming the Philippines' ratification. Ambassador Sanchez noted that the Philippines has been implementing the norms of the said protocol even prior to joining the treaty this year.

The Philippine and Spanish permanent missions to the United Nations in Geneva sponsored an event entitled "*Community-Led Universalization of CCW Norms: Lessons from the Philippines' Peace and Reconciliation Process*" on 22 July to brief GOE delegations on how the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019 entailed the implementation of CCW provisions in the said region.

Speaking at the said event, Mitzi Austero, programs manager of Non-Violence International Southeast Asia (NISEA), explained that multilateral negotiations and the entry into force of the CCW in the 1990s coincided with the development of laws and policies in the Philippines that promote peace and reconciliation in an inclusive and gender-sensitive manner.

This local norms-building eventually paved the way to the conclusion of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014, which includes provisions that require former armed rebels and government forces to cooperate to rid communities of ERWs and unexploded ordnance (UXO).

ERWs and UXOs threaten civilians, disrupt communities, and are sometimes a source of components for improvised explosive devices that armed groups like the New People's Army (NPA) use to conduct terrorist attacks. In some countries like Laos, freedom from ERWs and UXOs has been identified as a supplemental sustainable development goal (SDG).

Alfredo Lubang, national coordinator of the Philippine Campaign to Ban Landmines (PCBL), said at the same event that efforts are underway to finalize the regulatory framework for coordination between the central and regional governments in ridding Bangsamoro communities of ERWs and UXOs.

Since the establishment of BARMM, military and law enforcement units now coordinate with the new Bangsamoro Ministry for Public Order and Safety (MPOS). Former MILF rebels now assure local communities that Philippine military and law enforcement units conducting ERW and UXO disposal are not threats. This has in turn made it easier for communities to report ERW or UXO discovery to national authorities.

Lubang said this new arrangement sees formerly warring actors working together to safeguard local communities, a result of years of trust-building made possible by strong political will to promote humanitarian objectives on both sides.

“This political will was demonstrated for example when the MILF unilaterally renounced landmines because they are contrary to Islamic teachings, while then President Fidel V. Ramos ordered the unilateral destruction of all military mines after seeing their destructive effects during a state visit in Cambodia,” Lubang said.

“This political will was then cultivated by civil society, local community and religious leaders to further build trust among all actors,” he continued.

The example of the Bangsamoro demonstrates that the robustness of international humanitarian agreements like the CCW are best pursued at the grassroots, said Ambassador Maria Teresa T. Almojuela, deputy permanent representative of the Philippines to the United Nations in Geneva.

Universalization of CCW norms must be led by communities themselves, working with all stakeholders including civil society, and taking into account local nuances, the ambassador said. **END**