CHSVMUN '25

Background Guide

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(UNGA)

Agenda:

"Mitigating the Impact of Weapons Contamination on Civilian Lands: Tackling Unexploded Ordnance, Nuclear Fallout, and other Residual Munitions."

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear delegates,

We take great pleasure in extending a warm welcome to all of you on behalf of the Executive Board of the United Nations General Assembly of CHSV Model United Nations 2025. We are truly excited to have you as part of this committee, and we are looking forward to the discussions and ideas you will bring to the table on the agenda.

As a part of this committee, we expect delegates to be well-prepared with the background of the agenda, and the associated events/ conflicts/ scenarios which played a role in the circumstances that have led to the primary agenda. This topic is especially important since it deals with the long-term dangers that remain even after conflicts have ended.

In the UNGA, topics are usually broad and complex. We (the EB) encourage you to enter the committee with a clear idea of what your country stands for, and what you believe the committee should work on. We expect each delegate to bring in a set of creative, nuanced, and logically backed-up solutions for the committee. As a delegate, it is your responsibility to not just blurt out policy (solutions without nuance will not fetch you points), but to consider the realistic impact of your (and your fellow delegates') proposals, especially to your country and your partners.

The background guide that we have prepared is just a starting point, and it will be concise. We strongly urge you to go beyond it: research your country's history, current policies, and role in international efforts on demining, nuclear disarmament, or post-conflict recovery. It is equally important to be aware of legal developments (domestic and international), agreements, and past efforts at addressing the agenda, in order for you to be able to contribute at the highest level of debate in this committee.

Nuanced, mature, and fact-driven speeches and questions will make a big difference in this committee. We hope that you will be clear, respectful, and creative in your approach to the agenda and the committee. If you have any questions or need help at any point, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. We are here to support you and make this a great experience for everyone.

And always remember, the right kind of research can rival any amount of experience.

Wishing you all the best with your preparation, and we can't wait to see you in committee.

Warm regards,

Kasturiranga Sriram - Chairperson

Shyam Sundar - Vice-Chairperson

Sebastian Xavier - Director

INTRODUCTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Established in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly holds a central role as the main deliberative, policymaking, and representative body of the United Nations. Comprised of all 193 UN Member States, it serves as a platform for multilateral discussion on the full range of international issues outlined in the Charter. It also plays a key role in setting standards and codifying international law.

The Assembly convenes from September to December each year (main part), and then from January to September (resumed part), as needed, including for consideration of outstanding reports from the Fourth (SPECPOL) and Fifth (Administrative and budgetary) Committees. During the resumed session, the Assembly addresses current issues through high-level thematic debates convened by the President of the General Assembly. It also traditionally holds informal consultations on a broad array of substantive topics in preparation for the adoption of new resolutions.

According to the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly may:

1. Consider and approve the United Nations budget and establish the financial assessments of Member States.
2. Elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council and the members of other United Nations councils and organs and, on the recommendation of the Security Council, appoint the Secretary-General.
3. Consider and make recommendations on the general principles of cooperation for maintaining international peace and security, including disarmament.
4. Discuss any question relating to international peace and security and, except where a dispute or situation is currently being discussed by the Security Council, make recommendations on it.
5. Discuss, with the same exception, and make recommendations on any questions within the scope of the Charter or affecting the powers and functions of any organ of the United Nations.
6. Initiate studies and make recommendations to promote international political cooperation; the development and codification of international law; the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and international collaboration in the economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, educational and health fields.
7. Make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of any situation that might impair friendly relations among countries.
8. Consider reports from the Security Council and other United Nations organs.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

Agenda: “Addressing Human Rights Violations and Labour Exploitation in the Global Lithium Mining Industry.”
Unexploded Ordnance (UXO): “Unexploded ordnance means explosive ordnance that has been primed, fused, armed, or otherwise prepared for use and used in an armed conflict … and should have exploded but failed to do so.”- Article 2(2), Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (Protocol V)

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW): **“**Explosive remnants of war means unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance.”- Article 2(4), Protocol V (CCW)

Radioactive contamination: “Radioactive substances on surfaces, or within solids, liquids or gases (including the human body), where their presence is unintended or undesirable.”- IAEA Safety Glossary. This matches the scientific concept of **“radioactive fallout”**, which refers to the deposition of such contamination, typically after nuclear tests or accidents.

UNEP Decontamination Guidelines discuss “toxic industrial chemicals,” “depleted uranium,” “white phosphorus,” etc. in post-conflict environmental assessment frameworks.

Mine Action: The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) defines the term mine action as activities which aim to reduce the social, economic, and environmental impact of landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). The key objective of mine action is to reduce the level of risk from landmines and ERW to a level at which people can live safely; economic, social, and health development can occur free from the constraints imposed by landmine contamination, and victims' needs can be addressed. Mine action also aims to create local capacity in mine-affected communities, which is linked to the long-term aspect of rehabilitation and development.

Demining: denotes the clearance of land to internationally agreed standards. The objective is to clear given areas of land of all explosive devices, including mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and any other ERW.

Humanitarian demining involves technical surveying, mapping, clearance, marking, post-clearance documentation, community mine action liaisoning, and the handover of cleared land.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

Long after the cessation of armed conflict, the presence of weapons contamination continues to threaten the lives, livelihoods, and futures of civilian populations. Explosive remnants of war (ERW), nuclear fallout, and residual munitions render entire cities unsafe and prolong the humanitarian and socioeconomic toll of war. The consequences are severe in regions where civilians return to former conflict zones unaware of the lingering risks, where children mistake dangerous items for toys, or where agricultural land remains unusable due to contamination.

This agenda is especially consequential considering the prevalence of such contamination across continents. According to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), over 60 countries and territories remain affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war. In addition, reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UNEP have drawn attention to radiation contamination and toxic legacy weapons such as depleted uranium munitions and white phosphorus. Such weapons leave behind harmful residues with long-term environmental and health effects, often violating the principles of proportionality and distinction under international humanitarian law.

The humanitarian and environmental impact of post-conflict residues are severe. This is evidenced by the tens of thousands of civilian deaths and injuries annually due to UXOs (e.g., children playing or farmers plowing). Further, contaminated lands reduce access to safe and healthy food, water, schools, and infrastructure. Residual weapons lead to loss of biodiversity, poisoned groundwater, and unusable farmland due to fallout or chemical residue.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

Weapons contamination affects every Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) touched by conflict, especially those related to health (SDG 3), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), economic growth (SDG 8), and life on land (SDG 15). Civilian lands which are rendered hazardous by ERW or radiation cannot be cultivated, resettled, or rebuilt without extensive and expensive decontamination. Moreover, these weapons disproportionately affect rural communities, refugees returning to ancestral homes, and children, who often lack awareness of the dangers these remnants present.

Several international legal instruments provide a foundation for addressing this issue: the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), particularly Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War (2003), mandates the clearance, removal, and destruction of UXO after the cessation of active hostilities; the Ottawa Treaty (1997) bans the use, production, and stockpiling of anti-personnel landmines and mandates victim assistance; and the Oslo Convention (2008) similarly prohibits the use of cluster munitions. However, enforcement is a challenge considering the fact that several major powers are not party to these treaties. These documents largely exclude the newer threats of nuclear fallout and toxic contamination from weapons such as depleted uranium shells and white phosphorus.

UN agencies such as UNMAS, UNEP, IAEA, and WHO have responded with a variety of interventions: technical assistance for clearance, environmental health assessments, public health monitoring, and capacity building for local authorities. In collaboration with regional organizations and NGOs, the UN has supported mine-risk education, community reporting networks, and post-clearance recovery programs.

ABOUT THE AGENDA

Yet, real-world examples show that remediation efforts are often underfunded and slow-moving: in Laos, despite decades of clearance, a substantial percentage of rural land remains hazardous due to unexploded submunitions from U.S. bombing campaigns during the Vietnam War; in Fallujah, Iraq, long-term health issues linked to suspected use of toxic munitions remain under-researched and largely unaddressed, with ongoing debate over responsibility; and the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in Kazakhstan has seen significant efforts supported by the UNDP, but radioactive contamination still affects public health outcomes today.

Delegates are encouraged to examine how existing legal instruments can be strengthened or supplemented, how new contamination threats can be addressed under international law, and how affected countries can be better supported in clearance and rehabilitation efforts.

RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

1. Ottawa Treaty (1997) : Bans anti-personnel landmines. Over 160 states are parties. Not signed by U.S., Russia, China, India, Pakistan.
2. Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW, 1980) : Covers weapons deemed excessively injurious (e.g., Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War).
3. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, 2017) : Prohibits nuclear weapon use, stockpiling, testing. Not signed by nuclear powers.
4. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT, 1968) : Limits nuclear arms spread; promotes disarmament and peaceful nuclear use.
5. Geneva Conventions (esp. Protocol I, 1977) : Protection of civilians during and after conflict; regulates conduct of war.
6. Environmental Modification Convention (ENMOD, 1977) : Prohibits hostile use of environmental modification techniques.

UN REPORTS, GUIDELINES AND MECHANISMS

UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service): Coordinates demining operations, capacity-building, and risk education.

ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) Guidelines: On protection of civilians, including guidance for post-conflict recovery and explosive remnants.

UNODA Reports: Office for Disarmament Affairs issues reports on arms control and post-conflict disarmament.

WHO Reports on Radiation Exposure: Especially post-Fukushima, Chernobyl, and nuclear weapons use.

UNDP and UNEP: Active in environmental remediation and sustainable development in contaminated areas.

CURRENT UN AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

1. **UNMAS Programs**: Active in over 20 countries (e.g., Sudan, Mali, DRC, Afghanistan, and Ukraine).
2. **ICBL-CMC (International Campaign to Ban Landmines & Cluster Munitions)**: Civil society advocacy with strong international backing.
3. **Peacekeeping Operations**: Many mandates (e.g., MINUSMA, UNMISS) include mine action components.
4. **National Clearance Authorities**: Often supported by UNDP (e.g., CMAC in Cambodia, MAG operations worldwide).

CASE STUDIES

1. LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Between 1964 and 1973, the United States conducted over 580,000 bombing missions in Laos, making it the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. An estimated **270 million submunitions** (bomblets) were dropped, of which **approximately 80 million failed to detonate**. These unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to pose a severe risk to civilians, especially in rural and agricultural regions. Casualties have included children and farmers, while economic development is hindered by unusable land. Despite ongoing clearance operations supported by **UXO Lao**, **UNDP**, and international donors, less than 2% of contaminated land has been fully cleared as of 2024. This case highlights the challenges of scale, funding, and community education in mitigating UXO impacts.

CASE STUDIES

2. FALLUJAH, IRAQ

During the battles of Fallujah in 2004, intense combat involving **white phosphorus** and **depleted uranium munitions** resulted in long-term health and environmental consequences. Following the conflict, hospitals in Fallujah recorded sharp increases in birth defects, cancer, and other conditions linked to toxic exposure. While conclusive studies remain limited, reports by **WHO**, **UNEP**, and independent researchers suggest a strong correlation between the use of certain munitions and these outcomes.

3. SEMIPALATINSK, KAZAKHSTAN:

From 1949 to 1989, the Soviet Union conducted 456 nuclear tests at the Semipalatinsk Test Site. Large populations lived in close proximity to the site with little to no protection from radiation exposure. Even after the test site's closure in 1991, radiation contamination has persisted, affecting soil, water, livestock, and human health. The UN General Assembly, through Resolution 64/35, designated 29th August as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests and called for support to affected regions. UNDP and IAEA have been involved in monitoring, health support, and land reclamation efforts.

QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMA)

1. Should the UN mandate a standardized global reporting system for all forms of post-conflict weapons contamination, including UXOs, radioactive fallout, and toxic residues?
2. How can member states be incentivized or obligated to contribute financially or technically to clearance operations in countries they were involved in militarily?
3. Should the scope of Protocol V of the CCW be expanded to include toxic and radiological contamination, or should a separate instrument be introduced?
4. What minimum percentage of national defense budgets should be recommended for post-conflict clearance and civilian rehabilitation efforts in affected territories?
5. Should specific categories of munitions (e.g., depleted uranium shells, white phosphorus) be banned, restricted, or subjected to additional post-use environmental assessments?