



**OPENING STATEMENT OF THE CLUSTER MUNITION COALITION  
AT THE  
DIPLOMATIC CONFERENCE FOR THE ADOPTION OF A CONVENTION ON CLUSTER  
MUNITIONS**

**By Branislav Kapetanovic, CMC Spokesperson**

Dublin, 19 May 2008

Dear Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear fellow Campaigners,

First of all, allow me to express how satisfied I am to see so many States represented here in Ireland. The sheer number of you gathered here today proves that our common fight against this horrific weapon, whose victims are overwhelmingly civilians and very often children, has gained great significance and momentum.

Looking back, we should all be very proud of what we achieved. I well remember the somewhat difficult takeoff of this process of prohibiting cluster munitions in Oslo, but at the end of the week 46 countries committed themselves to the Oslo Declaration. The process grew stronger and stronger, and with every meeting from Lima to Vienna to Wellington, more countries joined. Today 109 countries are here to negotiate this treaty and I am confident that all States and all individuals in this conference room are here with a common goal: to solve the humanitarian problems that cluster munitions cause, to negotiate in earnest, and to have a successful result.

I have followed every meeting of this process. And at every meeting I could not only sense the growing support of the States, but also that of the public. I was approached by all kinds of people, expressing support for our cause to ban cluster munitions, from parliamentarians, journalists, politicians, and families. This overwhelming support was also demonstrated this morning when more than 704.000 signatures were handed to the Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs, asking for a comprehensive ban on cluster munitions. I hope we will not disappoint them.

I say this even though the meetings in the Oslo Process were sometimes also very difficult for me to listen to. As a survivor it offended me to hear some countries advocate broad exceptions for some types of cluster munitions, for instance because of claims that they have a "newer" and "better" self-destruct mechanism. Cluster munitions have been used for more than half a century and over and over again they have failed to meet the standards promised by the producers and users. I have lost my hands and my legs, and I have damaged hearing and eyesight due to a type of cluster munition that, when developed, was claimed to be newer and better. It was then shown in the First Gulf War to have an excessive failure rate. Yet it was still used several years later in Yugoslavia -- because the countries had it in stock. This is why the destruction of all cluster munitions is such an important element of the proposed treaty.

It has also been difficult for me throughout this journey to listen to some people that have claimed that cluster munitions are indispensable weapons to save the lives of their soldiers. There is no evidence for this statement. However, many soldiers have been injured in international operations because of duds from cluster munitions fired in the past by their own forces. That is a fact.

Speaking both as a deminer and as a former officer in the Yugoslavian army, I want to stress that I do not see any reason or purpose for the use of cluster munitions. We all know that cluster munitions during an attack cover a wide area, and thus even if intended for military targets only, can also hit civilian areas, as they cannot discriminate between civilian and military targets. And once one sees - as I have - a community affected by hundreds or thousands of unexploded cluster submunitions, their livelihoods destroyed, then there are no reasons that can justify their use in the first place.

These contaminated areas would then need to be cleared, which is a slow and expensive task. The reality in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia shows us that it takes decades to remove the contamination after the conflict, costing millions and millions of dollars. So why use them in the first place?

For the Cluster Munition Coalition, the objective in Dublin is clear: we want to achieve a comprehensive treaty prohibiting use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions. It must prohibit ALL cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians. And we want this prohibition to come into effect immediately. A transition period that would allow States to use cluster munitions for some time after they have been prohibited is unacceptable to us. Likewise, a treaty that allowed States to intentionally assist others with the use of cluster munitions would be a sham.

Moreover, we want the treaty to contain a strong obligation for victim assistance, an obligation that will make a difference on the ground, and will help affected individuals and communities.

To conclude, I would like to say that we have come a really long way in this year of the Oslo Process. The treaty has not been watered down in the process, but has in some areas, like victim assistance and clearance, grown stronger and better. The CMC is in general very satisfied with the main treaty proposal as it lies in front of you. Personally and as the representative of the CMC, I want to appeal to States, as well as to the President of this conference, to maintain and even strengthen the text during these two weeks of negotiations. It will be tough and exhausting, but I hope you will keep the treaty strong and never lose sight of why this treaty is needed: to prevent any more casualties like me.

Thank you.