

*Oslo Signing Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions  
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*Address by United Nations Development Programme*

*Kathleen Cravero*

*Assistant Administrator and Director of Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery*

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Just four years ago, when I arrived in UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, a Convention on Cluster Munitions was an impossible dream. The issue was too political, the problem too complicated, the process too stalled – in short, the obstacles to a Convention were simply too formidable to overcome. Thus, it seems a bit unreal to be in this hall today to mark the signing of this unreachable star.

Led by Norway and a core group of determined Member States – and supported by the United Nations and a cadre of civil society organizations - we are shining a bright light of hope in a troubled world. Amidst the terror, war, poverty and suffering that dominate headlines across the globe, this is a moment in history of which we can be proud.

On behalf of the United Nations Development Programme, and in solidarity with our sister agencies represented here today, I would like to offer three messages at this signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

First, we should not be blinded by the numbers. The contamination of land in 32 countries and territories, the claiming of over 13,000 lives, the theft of tens of thousands of livelihoods, the destruction of billions of dollars of property – the facts are overwhelming. But as others have reminded us today, this Convention is about people, not weapons. It is about safeguarding the lives and futures of children, families and communities across the world. It is about three boys tending cattle in a village in Cambodia, one of whom picks up a brightly colored object to show to his friends. It is about the death, loss of limbs and untold suffering which results from that innocent act. It is not the responsibility of these boys to be more careful; it is the responsibility of all of us to clear those fields. That is what this Convention will do – if it is taken seriously by Member States and international organizations.

Second, cluster munitions block development. We have heard several times today that this Convention will strengthen humanitarian law and mitigate the humanitarian impact of war. This is true. But let us not forget that this Convention will also make a significant contribution to development. In post-conflict settings around the world, explosive remnants of cluster munitions undermine hard won development gains. As surely as poverty, gender inequality and the absence of basic social services, cluster munitions make the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals impossible. If communities cannot work their lands, ply their trades or tend their cattle, they cannot and will not move forward.

Third, our task is not finished. This Convention was completed in record time. Its strong preventive nature is unique. It will render billions of sub-munitions obsolete, dispose stockpiled cluster bombs and – in the same way as the Mine Ban Treaty – stigmatize potential unilateral attempts for future use. The Treaty has strong provisions for clearance, for assistance to survivors and for international support of all these efforts. But only full implementation will give it meaning. This will require national ownership and, perhaps most important, national leadership. Leadership that cannot be written into its provisions, be forced from the outside, or “bought” through international assistance. This leadership needs to come from within – a determination to sign this Treaty, to ratify it, and to implement it. We need the kind of determination that will make this Convention mean something for the children playing in that field and for all of us.

So, yes, our gathering today is a historic step forward. This Convention on Cluster Munitions is a stunning example of how courageous, broad-based partnerships can face down even the most formidable challenges to human security and development. It is, however, the beginning of an exciting new phase in our battle against cluster munitions, not the end of the story. With so many already convinced, we urge all States that have not done so yet, to sign and ratify the Convention as soon as possible. And as the UN Secretary-General and my colleagues have indicated, the United Nations stands ready to support Member States to continue this journey toward a future free of cluster munitions.

Thank you.