

Opening remarks by the PM of the Republic of Croatia

Excellences, distinguished representatives of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, observer States, international and civil society organizations, Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to begin these opening remarks by extending my warmest welcome to all delegates and expressing my deepest appreciation for your presence here this week.

Just over seven years ago, many of us here today, met in Dublin for negotiations. We did so because we were “Determined to put an end for all time to the suffering and casualties caused by cluster munitions...” (*2nd paragraph, Preamble to the CCM*). Six months later in Oslo, in signing the Convention on Cluster Munitions, we agreed first and foremost (*Article 1.*) that we would... “never under any circumstances:

- a. use cluster munitions;
- b. develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer to anyone, directly or indirectly, cluster munitions;
- c. assist, encourage or induce anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under this Convention.”

We did so, because years of on-the-ground research and experience had shown that, because of their lack of precision, cluster munitions are indiscriminate and unreliable as a military weapon, while their large footprint, small size, and decades-long life of the duds, makes them especially insidious for civilians for years to come. (*One small example from our experience: two years ago, a bomblet was found on the roof of the children’s hospital in Zagreb, 18 years after the bombing occurred!*).

As one of the cluster munitions affected countries, Croatia is only too aware of both the human suffering and the developmental costs that cluster munitions leave as their legacy. Not surprisingly, Croatia has been a staunch supporter and active participant of the “Oslo” process from its very beginning.

Of course, we are well aware that compared to so many other cluster munition affected countries, Croatia’s problem is small and we are in a good position to solve it. That awareness, along with our ability and strong will to help other affected countries, is a major reason why we welcomed the opportunity, and today, are proud to host and preside over the First Review Conference.

Meeting here in Dubrovnik, a city torn by war just over 20 years ago, we should be reminded of the importance of our work and what collective efforts can, and must do for

recovery – having brought this city back to what you see and can experience today.

Dear Colleagues, from the very beginning, this Convention set for itself an ambitious program: destruction of all cluster munitions stored in stockpiles; demining of all contaminated national territories; comprehensive assistance to and rehabilitation of all mine victims; and of course, universalization, the only “guarantee” of a total and lasting ban on the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of all cluster munitions.

This week, as we review the achievements of the past eight years, we have reason to be pleased. As a result of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the norm that is emerging, over the past eight years, States Parties have destroyed 1,6 million cluster munitions and 160 million submunitions; this represents the destruction of 90% of cluster munition and submunitions declared as stockpiled by States Parties. That is good; but as we know, that is only the beginning of our work. While acknowledging what has been accomplished we now must focus on what still needs to be done.

As we know, we are about to enter a time period in which many States will meet their respective deadlines on both stockpile destruction and on clearance of cluster munition remnants in affected areas; a time period which saw 2015 start with the announcement of continued use of cluster munitions in Syria and in Ukraine and with alleged use also in Libya, South Sudan and Yemen. We are also entering a time period in which States will celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As we continue to struggle to ensure that international humanitarian law and the principles of humanity are applied to protect combatants and civilians alike, we need to remind ourselves that these are but a number of aspects that touch upon the very rationale and core obligations of the Convention itself.

In reviewing our work to date and tracing the path for our future, we must be mindful to do so with continued determination. For complacency can have no place when witnessing the devastation caused by violence and conflict on individuals, their families and communities, wherever it occurs. The preventive nature of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, combined with the recovery efforts put in place to remedy the damage done, is a testament to what can, and must be achieved when we learn of the consequences of conflicts.

Your Excellencies, dear Colleagues, we must remember that eventually, after every war comes peace. And that peace will be harder to achieve and more fragile to keep if, after peace treaties have been signed and hostilities have ceased, cluster bomblets continue

to claim new victims. The civilians whose lives they continue to endanger and ruin years after, are too often those who are most vulnerable – children, the elderly and women. For that is the very nature of this weapon. It is to protect their lives and to ensure their future – our collective future – that we have signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions. And that is why we will continue to work for full observance by its signatories, for universalization by the sceptics and for compliance to the Convention's norms among its potential users.

It is my hope and desire, as President of the First Review Conference, that these very aspects will serve as a reminder of our common cause and that all the decisions which will be taken will further strengthen the momentum among States parties and partners not only for the most effective and efficient implementation of the Convention in the forthcoming five-year period, but also, for a step closer to a world free of cluster munitions.

Thank you very much!