

***Dublin Diplomatic Conference
on Cluster Minitions***

Statement by Austria

Ambassador Alexander Marschik

19 May 2008

Mr. President,

Let me congratulate you on the assumption of this important position, as well as all members of the bureau. Let me also warmly thank you, as well as the Government of Ireland and the entire Irish team for hosting us here in the beautiful city of Dublin and for the many efforts to make this conference a success.

Mr. President,

Two months ago, we concluded the series of meetings which were designed to give a platform for all those involved in the Oslo Process against Cluster munitions to share information on and to discuss the many complex issues involved and the express views on how to proceed about drafting a treaty to prohibit cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians. The Conferences of Lima, Vienna and Wellington, as well as many regional Conferences, in Belgrade, San Jose, Brussels, Mexico City, Livingston and Bangkok were essential for all of us to gain a clearer understanding of the issues and possible ways to address them. I have found the discussions at the conferences I attended extremely interesting and worthwhile and I thank the many experts from governments and NGOs for sharing with all others their insights, their expertise and their positions.

At the end of the Wellington Conference Austria pointed out that it is rare for an international multilateral process to put so much effort into trying to create a level playing field for all parties involved, into trying to ensure that all parties gain an equal insight into the problems concerned, large states and small, those with a history of cluster munitions and those without but who are trying to help.

This is unusual for multilateral diplomacy. I understand the level of transparency and openness has caused unease with some. But I believe it was worth it: today, here in Dublin, we can now meet to negotiate a treaty on an equal footing.

We have had ample time to discuss, analyze, review our positions.

We have had time to study and comprehend the positions of others.

A common ownership has arisen out of this process, an ownership that can ensure the best possible outcome here in Dublin.

Mr. President,

Because of the transparent process, we have had ample opportunity over the course of the last year to explain our position. But let me recall briefly why, in the view of the Austrian Government, a comprehensive prohibition of cluster munitions is so important.

Every year, cluster munitions cause unspeakable suffering among civilians in conflict and post-conflict areas around the world, especially for children. Unexploded bomblets contaminate whole regions for decades after the actual fighting has ceased. Few conventional weapons present such a devious humanitarian danger and those that do - like landmines - have been internationally banned.

This morning, several speakers have referred to the lasting suffering that cluster munitions have caused and are still causing today – even in countries where the conflicts have ceased long ago: In Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam cluster munitions cause casualties among the civilian population every year some 40 years after they were employed.

Since 1999, millions of sub-munitions were dropped on Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kosovo and, most recently in summer of 2006, in Lebanon. The recurring reports about new victims continue to remind us that cluster munitions are a problem of today's world, of our generation, of all of us.

Mr. President,

Over the next two weeks, by negotiating a comprehensive treaty to ban cluster munitions, we can make a real contribution to achieving two objectives:

First: prevent the harm from happening.

Second: if harm occurs nevertheless, do whatever is possible to improve the situation of those who have fallen victim to these weapons.

To achieve the first objective we need a comprehensive definition of cluster munitions that need to be banned. We need to prohibit these weapons - their use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, and transfer.

Additionally, current stockpiles need to be destroyed expediently and contaminated areas need to be cleared in as short a time as possible.

The second objective comes into play, when – despite best efforts – it would not be possible to prevent harm from cluster munitions. For these cases, we need to ensure that those who fall victim to this weapon receive the best care possible. We believe that victim assistance must be a key element for any new instrument on cluster munitions.

In the negotiations Austria will contribute actively and constructively to achieving these two objectives, basing our contributions on the experience we have gained in our efforts both on the

- National level, where we adopted a moratorium on the use of cluster munitions in February 2007 and a federal law to ban all cluster munitions in January 2008, and on the
- International level, where we teamed up with a group of committed partners to work towards an international treaty and have, over the past months, consulted with many interested parties worldwide.

I am convinced that all States participating in the Dublin Diplomatic Conference share our commitment to conclude the Convention on Cluster Munitions in the next two weeks. We are all part in this team effort.

Mr. President,

The task ahead of us in the coming days is challenging.

But we have reason to be confident that together we will overcome remaining difficulties and agree on a strong and ambitious instrument that will make a real difference on the ground! Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik stated this morning – and I quote (though it is a rough translation from German): “This convention would constitute the most important treaty in the area of disarmament since a long time.” End of quotation.

I can assure you that the Austrian delegation is prepared to work constructively with you and other delegations to achieve this goal.

Thank you.