

**CLUSTER
MUNITIONS**
Dublin Diplomatic Conference
19-30 May 2008

Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions

Opening Statement, 19 May 2008

Micheál Martin T.D.

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland

Secretary General,
Distinguished opening speakers,
Welcome participants and observers,

We are here today in a noble cause.

For more than thirty years States have expressed their concern about cluster munitions. For many years, Ireland itself has been vocal on the subject, raising the issue regularly in Geneva and in New York. The 2003 Dublin Conference on Explosive Remnants of War gave further impetus to the international calls for action which have brought us here today.

Some people have queried Ireland's engagement on this issue. Why is a small country like Ireland concerned about cluster munitions? The answer is simple. First, we are motivated by humanitarian principles and a strong wish to see the worst effects of armed conflict, particularly on innocent civilians, prevented or mitigated.

In addition, through the efforts of our Defence Forces on peacekeeping missions over many years, we have developed considerable practical experience of the problems faced by affected communities from landmines and unexploded munitions. Our Irish Aid programme contributes to the clearance of such mines and munitions around the world.

We have learned lessons from these experiences – as have so many others here - and in our view these lessons can and should be applied so that the dreadful effects of cluster munition use on civilians can be avoided in the future. Together with others we were proud to participate in the launch of the Oslo Process in February 2007 – and let me salute here the particular role of the Norwegian Government - with the result that we are gathered here today to negotiate a new Convention.

There is a broad consensus on the two principal problems which have arisen from the use of cluster munitions, namely that:

- They can be indiscriminate at the time of use, thus harming civilians who are within range, and
- the high failure rate of sub-munitions at the time of impact has created an enduring hazard of unexploded ordnance, causing casualties long after the cessation of hostilities and making much land unusable.

At present, international humanitarian law does not adequately address these concerns. It is up to us here to do so. This is what brings us to this place now and why the Government of Ireland is honoured to host this conference for the negotiation and adoption of a Convention that prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

An encouraging feature of the Oslo Process has been the involvement of civil society from the outset. The Cluster Munition Coalition, which was formed after the Dublin Conference in 2003, represents over 200 NGOs actively campaigning on this issue. Many Irish NGOs have joined their ranks. Let me also mark the very particular role of the International Committee of the Red Cross, as guardian of international humanitarian law. I also welcome the participation of United Nations agencies – and we will hear the Secretary General’s message in a moment.

It is entirely appropriate in such a process that we all work together for an outcome which will strengthen international humanitarian law. It is not a traditional disarmament negotiation, where mutual suspicion and uneasy concessions tend to be the norm. In this process, we are all like-minded.

Delegates have had the opportunity to study the draft convention, and the proposals already on the table for amending it. No doubt other proposals will emerge in the coming days. Time is limited. We have less than a fortnight in which to reach agreement. This may seem tight, and indeed it is. However, considerable groundwork has been done at previous conferences in the process. The key issues are known to all.

Possible solutions have been aired. What is now needed is the will to bridge gaps and foster agreement.

In chairing the conference, Ireland will be seeking an ambitious outcome, with the widest possible support.

I know you share this determination. Together, we owe it to the survivors of cluster munitions to ease their pain and give them hope. Together, we owe it to humanity to ensure there will be no more innocent civilian victims of cluster munitions.

The legacy we all seek from this conference will be to know that together we have created a future unknown survivor, one symbolic person who, thanks to the new convention, will not fall victim to a cluster munition. There is no more compelling reason for us to work intensively and in good faith over the next two weeks, and to live up to the commitments we have all made to achieve agreement.

Thank you.