



GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA FOR THE OPENING OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Beirut, Lebanon, September 12-16, 2011

Mr. President Designate,

As this is the first time the Delegation of Croatia is taking the floor, I would like to congratulate and thank You and Your Team for the extensive and excellent work that You have undertaken in preparing the Second Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We are confident that You and Your able Team will do your best both to guide this meeting to a successful outcome and to provide leadership in the coming year. We also wish to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President and his Team for a job well done.

(I would also like to express our pleasure at finding ourselves in Your beautiful country....)

Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the 12 months since the Convention entered into force internationally, we have seen a remarkable progress being made. In its first year of life, a total of 109 countries have climbed on board the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This clearly shows that the majority of world's nations recognize indiscriminate nature and horrific effects of these weapons, particularly the harm they cause to civilians both during and long after a conflict ends. Despite worldwide efforts to curb the use of cluster munitions, in recent months we have witnessed a number of incidents that included the usage of those weapons. However, these incidents were met with international criticism, firmly demonstrating that even countries that are still outside the Convention are not exempt from condemnation if they use these weapons. It is therefore fair to say that while progress has obviously been made, great challenges remain. It should be our common goal to catalyze further progress in overcoming these challenges in the year ahead.

Mr. President,

One year ago we adopted the Vientiane Action Plan, agreeing to 66 concrete actions to guide our efforts over a period leading to this Meeting. The Vientiane Action Plan lays out a comprehensive framework for achieving progress in, among other areas, universalization, stockpile destruction, clearance and victim assistance. As such, it underscores the supremacy of the Convention. To ensure the effectiveness of the Vientiane Action Plan as a means of guidance, it is logical that we regularly monitor progress in the pursuit of its aims and identify challenges that remain. Doing so is what this Meeting should be all about.

The message is clear: We must act with urgency to live up to our commitments under the Convention. For instance: We all have a responsibility to continue universalization efforts –

considering that a number of states have not yet accepted the Convention's comprehensive approach to save countless lives by preventing future use of these indiscriminate weapons. Those States Parties in the process of destroying stockpiled cluster munitions must complete their stockpile destruction programs, if possible ahead of their deadlines, and as soon as possible. Croatia, for instance, is developing a stockpile destruction program together with Norwegian People's Aid and UNDP which offers many advantages for Croatian Armed Forces and Croatia in general. We therefore express our gratitude to Norway, NPA and UNDP for their assistance and partnership. Urgency is also required on the part of those States Parties which must fulfill their obligations of clearing all cluster munitions remnants from areas under their jurisdiction or control. And, if we are going to make a difference in the lives of cluster munitions victims, States Parties with the greatest responsibility to act need to proceed with efforts that are more concrete, specific and systematic in order to develop measurable and meaningful objectives. We are all aware that these are the most significant challenges to be addressed in the coming years.

Mr. President,

It is a well-known fact that the Republic of Croatia has been a strong supporter of the Convention on Cluster Munitions from its very beginning. Croatia was one of the original signatories and was the 17th country to deposit its legal instrument at the UN HQ in New York. By actively participating in the Oslo Process and by ratifying the treaty within six months of the signature Croatia has shown its genuine commitment to enhancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict and to humanitarian concerns more broadly. We were like many others present here today guided by the thought that particular interests must not stand above the well being of millions of civilians. That is why Croatia has consistently supported the strong language on victim assistance, the principle of non-discrimination, gender-sensitive approach and the necessity of effective national implementation. Together with our partners in the international community, we are continuously promoting this Convention in all appropriate international and regional forums, as well as in our bilateral and multilateral communications.

Having mentioned victim assistance, we would like to use this opportunity to reiterate Croatia's stand that victim assistance is not about charity – although charity should not be underestimated as a quality. Nevertheless, we must all realize that victim assistance is a matter of human rights and it is our obligation to make those rights available and accessible to all. Therefore, efforts must be increased in this field for victim assistance as such is an essential part of the promise of this Convention.

Mr. President,

With the Convention on Cluster Munitions, we have shown that much indeed can be achieved when a large enough group decides that something can and must be done. Croatia calls upon other countries to use this Meeting as a broad discussion panel for exchanging views on the most important aspects of the Convention. We are looking forward to a week of constructive and interesting discussions and thoughtful and thought-provoking presentations in a friendly and a cooperative atmosphere.

Thank you.