



ICRC

**Second Meeting of States Parties
to the
Convention on Cluster Munitions**

Beirut, Lebanon, 13 September 2011

Statement by Mrs Christine Beerli, Vice-President,
International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the Meeting of States party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions has moved from Laos to Lebanon, it is perhaps worth reflecting on the experience of these two countries in addressing the dreadful impact of cluster munitions on their populations. The massive use of these munitions in both countries occurred more than three decades apart. But the results were the same: widespread contamination from unexploded submunitions and large numbers of civilian casualties. Laos has faced an overwhelming clearance burden for over three decades now. Lebanon, with a far smaller contaminated surface, is still clearing after five years.

In the three decades between the end of the war in Laos and the end of the war in Lebanon, the legacy of cluster munitions and the ensuing harm to populations was repeated as additional countries or regions became contaminated including Afghanistan, Chechnya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kosovo and Serbia. Nearly 30 other places around the world suffered the same fate. The problem in Laos was largely forgotten outside that country. Cluster munitions were generally accepted as an essential weapon and the unacceptable harm they cause was viewed as unavoidable. The humanitarian problems caused by cluster munitions were supposed to be addressed through technical innovations such as "safety mechanisms" to improve their reliability.

Lebanon's experience changed everything. It showed the world that, with modern delivery systems, millions of submunitions could contaminate vast areas in a matter of days. It demonstrated that old cluster munitions continue to fail massively and that even more modern "safety mechanisms" don't always work. It illustrated the impact that contamination can have on every aspect of civilian life, from food production to reconstruction to health care in areas with a desperate need for these services. Widespread media coverage made the world pay attention. Within months, 25 States called for a new instrument of international humanitarian law to address this problem. When that initiative was blocked, the Oslo process opened the way to prohibiting cluster munitions that cause "unacceptable harm" to civilians. In many ways the Convention on Cluster Munitions was born of the suffering these weapons caused in Lebanon.

The States Parties and Signatories can be justly proud of what they have achieved in a relatively short time. The use of cluster munitions has been stigmatized, and this fact is having an impact also on the practice of States that are not yet able to join this Convention. The forceful response by States Parties and various organizations to the recent use of cluster munitions in Libya and in the Thai-Cambodian confrontation has served to further strengthen this stigmatization. Substantial new commitments have been made to help severely affected States and to address the needs of other States Parties. The combined effect of the Vientiane and Beirut meetings of States Parties will be to ensure that progress in stockpile destruction, clearance and victim assistance is reported, monitored and supported through formal and informal meetings each year. Though daunting tasks remain, particularly in the most severely affected countries, the States Parties must maintain their confidence in the historic value and impact of the norms they have created.

The priorities of the International Committee of the Red Cross at this meeting in Beirut and in the broader process of implementing the Convention are:

- firstly, rapid implementation of time-bound commitments in the fields of clearance and stockpile destruction

- secondly, ensuring measurable progress in victim assistance in the most severely affected States Parties, and
- thirdly, universalization of the Convention and the norms it contains.

Regarding the Convention's **time-bound commitments**, the Beirut Progress Report provides us with valuable insight into the implementation of the Vientiane Action Plan. Although the plan was adopted only 10 months ago, the trends identified are very encouraging. They show that nearly 65 million submunitions have already been destroyed as a direct result of the Convention. States Parties with obligations for clearance are taking steps to address the impact of cluster munitions in their countries. Most are developing or implementing the plans, budgets and mechanisms to fulfil the Convention's requirements in these areas.

Regarding **victim assistance in the most severely affected States**, experience has shown that the key to success remains national ownership, the involvement of survivors in setting victim assistance priorities and long-term support from international agencies and donors. This last element is essential because the most severely affected countries are also among the poorest.

Progress in the areas I have just mentioned will also depend on ensuring that all implementation activities, whether formal or informal, focus on the real challenges for specific countries. It is not guidelines but specific plans, projects and resource allocation that will ensure full implementation of the Convention. It is encouraging to note that the Beirut Progress Report shows a number of States Parties and Signatories assigning funds to implementation. We encourage all States and regional donor organizations to continue this trend. Far more resources will be needed in the years ahead.

In the field of **universalization**, the past 10 months have witnessed a steady increase in the number of States party to the Convention – up from 46 to 61. This reflects the constant efforts by many States Parties, the Cluster Munitions Coalition, the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross. But we believe that States can do even more by actively promoting this Convention regionally and through the various multilateral forums of which they are members. We would also expect States Parties and Signatories not to condone, encourage or agree to the continued use by other States of precisely the same cluster munitions, including those with a single safety feature, that they have banned in this Convention. These weapons were prohibited by States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions on the basis that these weapons cause “unacceptable harm to civilians”.

Mr President,

The road from Vientiane to Beirut has been travelled in a mere 10 months. But the road from Laos to Lebanon took more than three decades. The work of this meeting, and of States Parties in the coming months and years will help determine whether, in three more decades, the cluster munitions banned by this Convention are still causing “unacceptable harm to civilians”. States Parties and Signatories have made the political choice by joining the Convention. Our task now is to move from political vision to practical action.