

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND
NORTHERN IRELAND, DELIVERED AT THE 2MSP CCM, BEIRUT, 13 SEPTEMBER
2011

Mr President, my delegation will set out the UK position in full during the discussions this week. I hope you will permit me to shorten and personalize my comments.

Mr. President, it is a powerful signal that it is to Lebanon, whose beautiful landscapes and beloved children have been ripped apart in such a shameful way by cluster bombs, that the international community has come to reject in the strongest terms the use of these disgraceful weapons against civilians.

Mr President, I hope we are all here for one objective only: to rid the world of cluster bombs. We should forget the diplomatic platitudes, the cocktails, the comfortable surroundings, and focus all our energies relentlessly towards that.

In an anxious and divided world, we should be proud of the moments when we come together. The Convention on Cluster Munitions was one such moment. I was part of the UK team in Downing Street that worked flat out with our mission in Geneva to secure UK sign up in Oslo in December 2009. The arguments were fierce. But the humanitarian and moral case prevailed.

And these are not just words. The UK legislated, including severe penalties for anyone breaking the prohibitions. We have a strict export control regime. We have withdrawn all – more than 38 million - cluster munitions from operational service, and are systematically destroying them, ahead of schedule. We are using our role in the Commonwealth to press others to join the Convention.

As we ask others to examine their consciences, we acknowledge the issues that prevent the universalisation of a full ban. But we must be creative, impatient and determined in overcoming these constraints.

Banning cluster bombs is not enough. We must also repair the damage that has been done. The UK is supporting stronger health systems, the largest element of our bilateral spending on development. We have committed more than £30 million to a 3 year Mine Action programme, focused on clearance and education about the risks from cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war. In just 6 months, UK sponsored programmes in Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique and Vietnam have cleared 2.5 million square metres of land, and returned it to the communities for productive use. We have also committed £10 million over five years for mine action in Afghanistan.

Mr President, this week offers an important opportunity to consolidate and advance our collective effort. Tremendous progress has been made in 12 months.

But it is not enough, and we must not be complacent. The fact that countries are still using cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians should enrage us. We should not have to have this conversation again. The Beirut declaration must be the moment where we say: let this end, enough is enough.

Thank you.