

*Mr. Chairman, allow me to congratulate the government of Costa Rica for their initiative to organize this very important meeting. Let me assure you of Belize's full support in this drive to declare Central America a Region free of cluster munitions.*

Mr. Chairman,

We are honoured to be present at this, the *Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions*, and to be sharing what is an historic moment in the humanitarian disarmament agenda with all of you, my esteemed colleagues from both within the region and from around the world.

I take this opportunity to thank the Costa Rican Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their hospitality and exceptional organisational ability in hosting this important meeting. As we are well aware, Costa Rica, consistent with its history, has been active in the drive for global disarmament and in supporting other valuable humanitarian initiatives. The recent regional drive to place Central America at the forefront of renewed efforts to universalise the *Convention on Cluster Munitions* is another fine example, for which my Costa Rican colleagues deserve the highest of praise.

While Belize may have had a short modern history, we have had a relatively long history of commitment to global disarmament initiatives. Belize actively participated in the Oslo Process that created this Convention and we sought strong wording in favour of the ban on cluster munitions. At the conclusion of those negotiations, we joined in the consensus adoption of the Convention. Consistent with this firm support for global disarmament, Belize is a proud party to the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty* – another very important international instrument aimed at eliminating these most terrible and indiscriminate weapons. We have never used, produced, or stockpiled antipersonnel mines for any purpose, including training. We enacted comprehensive legislation to domestically enforce the antipersonnel mine prohibition ten years ago, demonstrating our clear commitment to that treaty's provisions.

The humanitarian concerns with cluster munitions are similar to land mines, in that they remain a latent threat well after a conflict has finished. While the intention of the weapon is for denotation to occur on impact, we know that up to 40 percent do not explode in this way and therefore remain undetonated. Often these sub-munitions are free-falling; therefore, incorrect use, wind and other factors can cause them to land well outside their intended target area. In nearly every conflict where they have been used over the past 70 years, cluster munitions have taken a heavy toll on civilians both during the fighting and after hostilities have ended. Unexploded cluster munitions impede farming, reconstruction, and development activities. Clearing unexploded sub-munitions after a conflict is often difficult, dangerous, and expensive.

Mr. Chairman,

Belize as a nation of law, of course, acknowledges the limited rights that states possess to employ force. However, we are utterly committed to the employment of these rights subject to the robust framework provided by the various international

humanitarian legal instruments. As a community of nations, we cannot allow weapons that injure and kill civilians indiscriminately to proliferate and we must actively work towards their elimination.

It is in this light that I am pleased to announce three steps Belize is taking towards advancing the global disarmament agenda. Firstly, I take this opportunity to inform this meeting that Belize has signed and will now be depositing an instrument of accession to the *Convention on Cluster Munitions*. Secondly, we are submitting today the *Model Declaration of Intent to Apply the Convention Provisionally* to signal our commitment to the provisions in the Convention ahead of completing our domestic legal processes. Thirdly, we are in the initial stages of drafting legislation to implement the provisions of the Convention. These three steps indicate Belize's absolute commitment to the Convention and desire to advance the cause of humanitarian disarmament.

We believe this Convention represents an excellent opportunity for international cooperation on a pressing global issue. The more states that join the Convention, the greater the degree of stigmatization of cluster munitions and their use. Therefore, Belize strongly supports the universalisation of the Convention and encourages other states, not yet signatories, to consider supporting this important global effort.

Mr. Chairman,

I remarked at the beginning of this statement that we are proud to be sharing this historic moment with you. Historic indeed, as Belize announces these initiatives we are supporting Central America's goal of becoming the first sub-region in the world to have had all nations ratify the Convention. Belize has never used, produced, transferred, or stockpiled cluster munitions and we are of course committed to peaceful and constructive regional dialogue. We value our important Central American friendships and so we most look forward to moving ahead with our close neighbours to advance these important discussions.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute meaningfully towards the elimination of a weapon that presents grave consequences for civilians who are indiscriminately targeted both during and even after conflict. You can be assured of Belize's commitment to this Convention and I look forward to further discussions in the coming days to advance this important agenda.

Thank You