

Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions

Statement by Ms. Yoriko Yasukawa, Resident Coordinator, United Nations in Costa Rica
San José, 1 September 2014

National Opening Ceremony

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a great privilege for me to address this 5th Meeting of State parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. On behalf of the United Nations System, I wish to join our hosts in extending a warm welcome to you all. I would also like to thank the Government of Costa Rica for hosting this important meeting and to congratulate Costa Rica for its election as President of the 5th Meeting of the State Parties.

During a recent visit to Costa Rica, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon stated that Costa Rica's leadership on the issue of cluster munitions is yet one more example of the country's commitment to the cause of peace and disarmament. Indeed, Costa Rica's pioneering leadership in this sphere goes back decades. In 1948, Costa Rica took the bold step of abolishing its army. The country played a key role in the achievement of peace in Central America in the 1980s and the 1990s. Costa Rica's insistence on a Code of Conduct for Arms Transfers led to the Arms Trade Treaty adopted last year by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The most recent example of Costa Rica's leadership in disarmament efforts has been its effort to forge a commitment by the countries of Central America to make this region the first one in the world to be declared free of cluster munitions.

The United Nations System hopes that this meeting will also be an opportunity for the participating countries to be inspired by, and learn from these valuable experiences in disarmament and peace building. The approval and entry into force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions constitute truly ground breaking progress toward putting an end to the harm caused by these terrible weapons. The Convention establishes a categorical ban on cluster munitions and obligates the State parties to eliminate stockpiles, clear contaminated areas and provide assistance to victims of cluster munitions. The Convention also provides the framework for cooperation among states and other partners to address the challenges faced by affected communities in the effort to rid the world of this menace.

Four years after the entry into force of the Convention, most of the affected countries and many former users, producers and stockpilers have joined this effort. The work done every day by State parties to implement the provisions of the Convention, in clearance and risk reduction activities, in stockpile destruction and in assistance and support to victims, their families and communities, is already making a difference. In 2013, 130,380 stockpiled cluster munitions were destroyed, and 54,000 cluster munitions remnants were destroyed during the clearance of almost 31 km² of contaminated land. These advances are also product of the invaluable partnership between states, international organizations such as my own, the ICRC and the IFRC and, not least, the civil society working hand in hand.

But we still have a long way to go until we achieve the purpose of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which is ultimately to eliminate these weapons from the face of the earth. Despite the great majority of the countries of the world having ratified the Convention, cluster munitions continue to be used, and continue to kill and injure innocent civilians, including women and children. The number of victims is estimated to reach 55 000 over the past 5 decades.

The United Nations System reiterates in particular its condemnation of the ongoing use of cluster munitions in Syria and in South Sudan. We are also dismayed at the recent allegations of use in eastern Ukraine. At the same time, the difficulties in establishing the party responsible for these cases demonstrates that the collective international endeavor within the framework of the Convention has indeed led to a global condemnation of these weapons, that is having an impact even on States not party to the Convention. That is why it is so important that countries use all relevant international fora to systematically and repeatedly condemn the use of cluster munitions and call for investigations on allegations of their use.

This is also why we are concerned that progress toward universalizing the Convention seems to be slowing down recently. Since the last Meeting of States parties in Lusaka last year, Saint-Kitts-and-Nevis has submitted its instruments of ratification and we are hoping that one more country will do so tomorrow. While we congratulate these countries for this important decision, it is important to remember that there are still 29 signatories and 80 States not Party that have yet to ratify or accede to the Convention. We urge all of them to take this crucial step as soon as possible. Universal adherence to the Convention is essential for guaranteeing that no one will ever again lose his or her life, be maimed or lose a loved one because of cluster munitions. We must persevere until we reach this goal.

If this seems difficult, it is good to remember that Costa Rica, our host country, chose the path of peace, democracy and inclusive development when this was not at all an obvious or easy choice, when repressive dictatorships and civil wars were common in Latin America. Costa Rica not only chose this difficult path but persevered on it, so that the country we find ourselves in now continues to be, in the words of our Secretary General, a symbol of peace for the world, with a vibrant democracy and admirable achievements toward ensuring a life of dignity for all its inhabitants.

We hope that, inspired in this example, the state parties gathered here today will use this meeting to take concrete steps toward freeing humanity of the scourge of cluster munitions, thereby also helping to realize the ideal of the United Nations Charter – a world in which we can all live together in peace with one another as good neighbors.

We wish you all a successful meeting.