



Republic of Ghana

OPENING REMARKS

BY

**LT. GEN. JOSEPH HENRY SMITH (RETD),
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF ACCRA REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
UNIVERSALIZATION OF THE CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS (CCM)
MONDAY 28TH MAY, 2012, LA PALM ROYAL BEACH HOTEL, ACCRA, GHANA**

The Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration,

The Honorable Minister for the Interior,

Excellencies,

Representatives of States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions,

Heads of associated UN Organizations, Bodies and Programs to the Convention,

Representatives of international NGOs,

Activists and personalities participating in this Conference,

Journalists and media representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank you for this honor, which I appreciate the more highly and accept the more readily because of my deep interest on issues concerning Cluster Munitions. For many of you to travel long distances to participate in the Conference serves to remind us all just how important this Conference is.

As government and independent experts, I am convinced that you are already well aware of the impacts which cluster munitions can have on people's lives, their livelihoods and their communities. These impacts have been well documented at various forums by international and non-governmental organizations.

For about half a century, cluster munitions have inflicted suffering on civilians. Victims of armed conflicts have lost limbs, livelihoods, and even their lives. Cluster munitions are deadly both at the time of attack and afterwards. During strikes, they blanket areas the size of football fields with submunitions that spray high-velocity fragments in all directions. Many of these submunitions fail to explode on impact and linger for months or even years, able to be accidentally detonated by the unsuspecting farmer or child. The impact of these weapons has been felt around the world.

The importance of this meeting is also because it is a forum, to share our information and expertise and to share our experiences and concerns, so as to ensure practical implementation of the various provisions of the Convention.

Your participation and deliberation in this Conference therefore, is crucial in reminding us of our priorities and to help us focus our work on the real needs and challenges that exist. No one knows better than you what the effects of cluster munitions are, and of measuring how we live up to the commitments we as States Parties to this Convention have made, reminding us of the imperative of the preventive

I am heartened by the critical role the Convention is playing in ensuring peace especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and hope that this expert meeting will deepen insights, identify options and speed up efforts being made to universalize the Convention in the Sub-Region, thus bringing closer the day when the tragic impact of cluster munitions would be a thing of the past.

I would like to urge all of you present here today to keep in mind the people who are not at this meeting. These are the civilians at risk daily from the presence of cluster munitions and who have been killed or injured by these weapons. These are the families who will provide care and support to the disabled survivors for the rest of their lives. And these are the communities that try to resume a normal life in the presence of unexploded submunitions while waiting to learn which of their sons or daughters will be the next victim.

I wish everyone very well in the deliberations over the next few days and hope that you will emerge more energized than ever and that you will be able to send out a message of commitment of Sub-Saharan African States to rid the continent of these weapons.

Thank you.