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Statement by Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič, Director-General of the Slovenian Foreign Ministry, Head of Delegation at the Second Review Conference of the Convention on Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, Cartagena, 3 December 2009

Madam President, Dear Colleague, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first congratulate you, Ambassador Eckey, for Presiding the Second Review Conference of the Convention on Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines. I appreciate your effective conduct of the work of the Conference and of this High Level Segment. I would also like to thank the Government of Colombia for hosting us in this beautiful city of Cartagena. The efficient organization of the Conference and of a number of side events demonstrate clearly the importance that Columbia attaches to the issue of landmines.

The Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World represents an important landmark in the life of what has come to be known at the Ottawa Convention. A decade after its entry into force, we can conclude that the Convention is a success story as it has made a real difference on the ground. We have made particularly important steps forward in the field of mine destruction and in providing assistance to victims. As we are about to adopt the Cartagena Declaration and the Cartagena Action Plan, we have to look at the challenges that still lie ahead of us.

In this connection, I would like to express full support for the statement that the Head of the Swedish Delegation delivered on behalf of the European Union. In addition to that, I would also like to outline three issues that Slovenia considers of special importance.

In our view, the first important challenge for all of us is the continued universalisation of the Convention. This is without a doubt a long-term project and many fellow States Parties devote a lot of their time and resources to that end. Slovenia applauds them for their work. Despite the good will of many people, a lot of work still remains to be done. In this regard, we are particularly thankful to Canada for chairing the contact group on universalisation. Slovenia is deeply convinced that only together we can do better. We believe in a step-by-step approach, meaning that we have to work as systematically as possible on a case-by-case basis with regard to the countries that are not parties to the Convention. We hope that by next year we will manage to enlarge our mine action family with at least one new State Party.

The second very important challenge that we face is the provision of more victims assistance. A lot has been achieved in this regard in the course of the last decade, but we can do better. Affected countries should be more active in formulating comprehensive national policies and legislation to ensure better care for mine survivors. And, by the same token, we, the donors, should keep up our determination to provide more assistance to the affected people, their families, communities and the countries in need, particularly to vulnerable groups such as children and women. Our goal should be to take care of all mine victims and help them to reintegrate into their normal lives, thus steering international development efforts.

As the third challenge, let me emphasize the need to preserve long-term sustainable financing of the worldwide mine action efforts. When addressing landmine problems, we should overcome donor fatigue and provide sufficient amount of resources to achieve our goals. The present financial and economic crisis should not be misused as a convenient excuse for not supporting mine action activities around the globe.

Speaking in my capacity as the Head of the Slovenian Delegation I would also like to recall that eleven years ago, following the ratification of the Convention, Slovenia established the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance. Initially, the prime focus of the ITF was the region of South-East Europe, which had experienced the ravages of war and the problems of persistence of land mines and other explosive remnants of armed conflict long after the hostilities ended. A successful regional approach in South-East Europe encouraged further engagement and today the ITF is already actively present on the ground with its mine action activities in other parts of the world. I would therefore like to thank the Vice-President of Colombia for mentioning Slovenia as one of the donor countries that has contributed to fighting the land mine problem here. Our donation was realized through the ITF and we look forward to cooperating with it in the future in order to strengthen our activities in assisting people and their families in other regions. In this connection, I would like to mention that at a recent conference in Tajikistan the local OSCE Office and the ITF presented the initiative of a multi-phase approach to development of a regional cooperation and coordination body in mine action in Central Asia and the road map to its establishment. Slovenia strongly supports this project and hopes that other countries will do so too.

Before concluding, Madam President, I would like to commend the initiative of your country to set up a task force to evaluate the financing of the Implementation Support Unit in Geneva, which serves as the Secretariat of the Convention. We should provide sufficient amount of resources to the ISU and its highly dedicated staff in order to allow them to meet the requests from States Parties for the needed assistance.

Finally, let me underline that only together, we the States Parties to the Convention, in cooperation with regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations, can achieve our common goal. It is therefore important that with the Cartagena Action Plan we have defined our tasks and goals for the next five years, until the Third Review Conference. In this period Slovenia will, in close cooperation with the International Trust Fund for Demining and Victims Assistance and its partners, continue to work actively towards our final objective - a world free of anti-personnel mines.

Thank you for your attention.