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President of the 9th Meeting of States Parties to the Antipersonnel
Mine Ban Convention

High level Opening of the Workshop, Tuesday 7 April 2009, 09:00

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

It is a pleasure to speak to you today as President of the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention.

I thank the Republic of Tajikistan for hosting this important workshop on Progress and Challenges in Achieving a Mine-Free Central Asia. And I wish to thank the European Union, through its Joint Action, for providing the support necessary to make this workshop a reality in such a contaminated region.

Since the very beginning of this collective effort for a *Mine Free World*, States Parties' constant commitment has been a key element in the promotion of peace and human security worldwide.

This year we have celebrated the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of our Convention, and initiated our march to Cartagena, the venue of the Second Review Conference. The regional workshop we attend on the following days is an important milestone of this march.

During this past decade, we have shared a deep humanitarian conviction that no one must be subjected to the inhumane, indiscriminate and - with our Convention - illegal nature of antipersonnel mines. We have translated this conviction from thoughts into substantial actions.

The vision and dream we have pursued over the ten last years can become the reality of the next decade. What could motivate us further to work towards this noble goal?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ten years after entry into force, it is time now to assess our experiences and to identify the challenges ahead.

Despite the progress made, it is clear that the pursuit of our core aims is a challenging, difficult and long-term task. I am confident, however, that the spirit of cooperation that has persisted in the work of this Convention will enable us to overcome these challenges.

Today, a total of 156 countries – 80% of the world's nations – are parties to the Convention, but only a half of its population is covered by it. Nevertheless, the production and the use of the weapon have been stigmatized and the Convention's principles have been recognized by States not parties as well.

Our Convention has moral authority. Indeed, the secret of its success resides in the effort made by the international community and non-governmental organizations.

Considerable progress has been made with regard to *victim assistance*, *stockpile destruction* and *mine clearance*.

The Convention has helped dramatically reduce the number of new victims and has created conditions for victim assistance and socio-economic reintegration of survivors.

For instance, we have learnt about best practices of first aid, and how to better create opportunities for socio-economic reintegration.

In particular, recent developments have brought very positive results in addressing the rights and needs of Persons with Disabilities, including victims of any type of explosive remnants of war.

I hope that as President I can contribute to encourage greater national ownership by all relevant States Parties. For those which have reported to be ultimately responsible for significant numbers of survivors, it will be essential to demonstrate real progress by the time of the Second Review Conference.

With *stockpile destruction*, we have established a confidence building process among States parties and civilian populations. In destroying over 41 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines, we have made great progress in ensuring that antipersonnel mines would never be employed again.

Nevertheless, compliance issues remain an urgent challenge to the Convention. While the list remains short in terms of the number of States Parties for which Article 4 remains relevant, the challenges relating to implementation are more profound than ever before.

Three States Parties, including two with great means, did not respect their deadlines for the destruction of their stocks. A fourth State Party has indicated that it risks missing its deadline.

My hope is that the European Commission will work in a flexible and persistent manner to conclude cooperation arrangements with two of these States to ensure that their stocks will be destroyed soon.

To those non-compliant States Parties that do not require assistance in stockpile destruction, I would therefore call upon them to regularly keep us informed of their progress, and to ensure compliance by the time of the Second Review Conference.

With regard to *mine clearance*, we have made considerable progress over the past ten years. Vast tracts of land have been demined and put to productive use.

As shown by Afghanistan and Tajikistan's cases, we have been realistic in accepting that some States with huge contamination and environmental constraints will not be in a position to finish the job in ten years.

As recorded for the first time last year, 15 States parties with clearance deadlines in 2009 submitted requests for extension at the Ninth Meeting of States Parties.

We granted the requests submitted. But we did so only after a long and serious review and by being clear and transparent in recording the basis for our decisions.

We also developed the methods to dealing with future extension requests, which I hope will remain only exceptional.

This year I have the task to chair the group that has been mandated to analyse extension requests that were submitted by three States Parties: Argentina, Cambodia and Tajikistan.

We are now well aware of how in many instances Landmine Impact Surveys have distorted the nature, size and location of the implementation challenge. We must now develop future plans based on more accurate figures (and timeframes) and apply the lessons that we have learnt to more efficiently deploy clearance assets.

In addition, I will give attention to other States Parties in the process of implementing Article 5, in particular to those that have been granted extensions, which need additional assistance to finish the job.

With respect to *universalisation*, I will recall that the accession process has been slowing down over the recent years. In fact, no State has ratified or acceded to the Convention since November 2007, keeping up to 39 the number of States not parties to the Convention.

Among the 39 States not parties, there is a number of non-members countries in Central Asia which possesses anti-personnel mines and/or are suffering from the consequences of the use of mines. I call upon these countries to take concrete steps towards the Convention and to attend the Second Review Conference in Cartagena.

Clearly, our task is not yet complete, that is why I have made universalisation one of my top priorities during my Presidency. In March I travelled to the Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, I recently visited Armenia, Georgia and Poland. I also hope later this year to engage senior officials in Lebanon, Mongolia, Nepal and the USA.

I commend the European Union for adopting a Joint Action in support of the universalisation of the Convention. And I hope in particular that the two remaining European States - Finland and Poland - will soon join the community of States Parties.

Finally, another important issue will be to foster dialogue among States Parties and *Non-State Actors*. Armed groups constitute a real challenge to the full achievement of the Convention's aims.

It is very important that *Non-State Actors* end the use of antipersonnel mines. Only in this way, will we be able to improve the situations of affected populations and prevent new victims.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The experience we have achieved in implementing this treaty is significant. This experience makes us more comfortable for future decisions and actions that we will have to take.

In this regard, I would suggest that there might be great opportunities for synergies between the Mine Ban Treaty and the new Convention on Cluster Munitions.

It is vital to decide how to harmonize and coordinate the different meetings and tasks associated with these two sister conventions, and eventually also with Protocol V of the CCW.

In addition to Cluster munitions, we have to deal with other huge tasks: the Programme of actions on Small Arms and light weapons and the struggle against terrorism - to mention only a few.

It is essential that we look at the future, particularly in this affected region : my appeal to donors and affected countries is that these new issues deserve all our attention, but they should not divert us from the commitments we made when we joined the Mine Ban Treaty.

By fostering regional partnerships, we can maintain - and possibly increase - our commitment to our noble common goal. But it will be crucial for the international community to renew its efforts in order to contribute to achieve a Mine-Free Central Asia.

In conclusion, I wish to congratulate Tajikistan - and other States Parties in the region - for their efforts at promoting the Convention.

Thank you.