

Ambassador Jürg Streuli, President of the 9th Meeting of States Parties to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva

High level Opening of the Workshop, Tuesday 24 February 2009, 18:00

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

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

I thank the Republic of Nicaragua for hosting this workshop on Progress and Challenges in Achieving a Mine-Free Americas.

And I wish to thank the European Union, through its Joint Action, for providing the support necessary to make this workshop a reality.

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.

Our commitment has been essential in taking on global activities in the areas of humanitarian aid and development cooperation.

On 1st March, we 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 of the Mine Ban Treaty. The workshop we attend on the following days is the first milestone on this march.

During this decade past, 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.

During the last ten years, we have translated this conviction from thoughts into actions.

We have succeeded in promoting respect for the core aims of the Mine Ban Convention. We have succeeded in nurturing our spirit of cooperation and the partnerships between governments and civil society organisations.

Through our commitment, we have set out on a path that will lead us to a world with no more mines and no more victims.

What was for many - ten years ago - only a vision or a dream, can be reality in the next ten years.

What could motivate us more to work towards this noble goal?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The implementation of the Convention is well advanced.

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

Ten years after, a total of 156 countries – almost 80% of the world's nations – are parties to the Convention - but only an half of the population is covered by it.

The majority of States, including all 156 States Parties, have ceased production. The use of the weapon has been stigmatized and the Convention's norms have been recognized by States not parties as well.

Our Convention has a moral authority.

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

The secret of the Convention's success is the combined effort of the international community and non-governmental organizations.

The Convention has helped in reducing the number of new victims - from 20'000 annually in 1997 to 6'000 victims in 2007 - and created conditions for victim assistance and socio-economic reintegration of survivors.

For instance, we have learned how it is important that dealing with *victim assistance* will have an inclusive, non-discriminatory, as well as a gender-sensitive approach.

We have learned about best practices of first aid. And we have learned how to better create opportunities for socio-economic reintegration and how to elaborate national and international standards.

We have developed a long-term process for victim assistance in a broader context, which has required a continuous commitment of all.

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.

What we have achieved so far is a great step forward. But there is still progress to be made in terms of equal access to reintegration opportunities for survivors.

With *stockpile destruction*, we have established a base for a confidence building process among States parties and civilian populations.

In destroying our stocks, we have made great progress in ensuring that antipersonnel mines would never be used again.

In the past ten years, more than 41 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines have been destroyed by States Parties.

What we have achieved so far is not a *Mine-Free World*. But at least, we have made a significant step forward.

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

We have also been realistic in accepting that some States with huge contamination or environmental constraints would not be in a position to finish the job in ten years.

In 2008, the Convention reached a significant milestone. For the first time, 15 States parties with clearance deadlines in 2009, including Nicaragua, submitted requests for extension on these deadlines. Those requests were considered at the 9th Meeting of the States Parties.

For the first time, we faced a new tremendous challenge. We asked the requesting states to reaffirm their commitment and to submit concrete plans for immediate demining.

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 were successful because the extension request process produced key lessons that will assist the concerned states in implementing the results.

For instance, we identified and encouraged the application of the full range of technical and non-technical methods to release suspected hazardous areas.

We also laid the basis and developed the methods to dealing with future extension requests, which we hope will be the exception and not too numerous.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the progress made, we all know there is still so much to be done before we fulfil the Convention's promise of an end, for all people for all time, of the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines.

Ten years after entry into force, it is clear that implementation is a challenging, difficult and long-term task. I am confident however, that we will deal with unresolved issues and that we will make sure to take into account of all existing and new methods available.

39 States are not yet members of the Convention. This is too much. The accession process slowed down after the best years. That is why I am committed to making *universalization* a top priority during my presidency.

I will encourage bilateral, regional and global efforts to encourage States not parties to join our noble effort. And I will visit a series of countries that we have identified as possible candidates.

In this regard, I commend the EU Member States for adopting a Joint Action in support of the Convention. I hope that the too last EU-States will join the Convention soon.

With respect to *demining*, I have the task this year to chair the group of States Parties that has been mandated to analyse extension requests submitted under Article 5 of the Convention.

These states are the following : Argentina, Cambodia and Tajikistan. My preoccupation with Article 5 implementation, however, will not be limited to these States Parties.

I will also call for ongoing attention to be given to States Parties, like Nicaragua, that have already been granted extensions but which need additional assistance to finish the job.

Compliance on *stockpile destruction* will remain an urgent and difficult challenge to the Convention in the future.

There are three countries which did not respect the four years deadline for the destruction of their stocks. Unfortunately, we would most probably have to add more countries to this list which faces a huge stock problem and needs foreign aid and cooperation.

It is therefore paramount that cooperation and assistance arrangements will be concluded as soon as possible in order that stocks can be destroyed. In this regard I would commend the European Commission for making funds for destruction available and work tirelessly to conclude cooperation agreements.

While this workshop is being held in the context of a build-up to the Second Review Conference, it is important that we not only review the past but also look towards the future.

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.

We will need to decide how to interlink and coordinate the different tasks associated with these two sister instruments in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to keep interest in the Mine Ban Treaty.

Another issue will be to encourage further dialogue among States Parties and *Non-State Actors*.

As we know, armed groups constitute a real challenge to the full achievement of the Convention's aims.

It is vitally 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,

In ten years we have established an example for other conventions on disarmament and humanitarian law. In ten years, the experience we have gained is significant.

This experience makes us more comfortable and motivated for future actions and decisions that we will have to take. We all know that our efforts are not vain and that results are continuous and measurable.

The Convention must stay relevant, also for the next ten years. It must get its share of attention and the corresponding means.

We all know that there are huge tasks and issues : we have the new Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Programme of actions on Small Arms and light weapons (these weapons kill more than 500'000 people every year), the combat against terrorism - to mention only a few.

My appeal to donor and affected countries is that these new tasks deserve all our attention. But they should not turn us away from the commitments we made when we joined the Mine Ban Treaty.

We must maintain, and if possible increase, our engagement to our noble common goal.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Nicaragua and other states of the region for their commitment to the Convention. Their dedicated efforts will contribute to achieving a Mine-Free Americas.

Thank you.