

Berlin Conference on the Destruction of Cluster Munitions, 25.-26. June 2009

Opening statement by Deputy Minister Espen Barth Eide

1. Introduction

First, let me thank our hosts Germany for organizing this conference, which is a timely and highly relevant initiative that will help to ensure rapid implementation of one of the core provisions of the Convention on Cluster Munitions; stockpile destruction.

Addressing Article 3 and stockpile destruction early in the life of the CCM is extremely important to avoid situations of non-compliance in the near future.

We know that the challenges are formidable, both due to the sheer quantity of cluster munitions in stock and the technical complexities in destroying them in a safe and effective way.

This conference gives us an opportunity to hit the ground running when the Convention enters into force, hopefully already next year.

I was very happy to hear Minister of State Gernot Erler's announcement that Germany is now ready to ratify the convention. I strongly urge other States to follow Germany's example and to complete their ratification procedures as soon as possible.

It is important to underline that we through this Convention have not only established a legally binding text for the states signing and ratifying it, we have also made contributions to the development of a broader, global norm. In this respect it is interesting to take note of the fact that the prohibition on cluster munitions already seems to have had a material effect also for those States which have not yet signed nor ratified the Convention. There have been examples of such States criticising each other in the media for the use or alleged use of cluster munitions. Like the Mine Ban Treaty, this new treaty is therefore quite likely to have a powerful effect in stigmatizing cluster munitions, so that even those countries that do not sign the Convention will not be able to use them without being subject to serious international condemnation.

2. The broader framework

Article 3 of the Convention concerns more than the safe destruction of stockpiled cluster munitions. It is this article, together with the prohibition on use, which ensures us that cluster munitions will never be used again.

It is the non-proliferation measure of the Convention and as such a key confidence building measure. This confidence building is important between the future States Parties but no less important towards our true constituencies – civil society and the individual citizens that have demanded an end to the use of these weapons.

Confidence and public trust is built by transparency, and therefore we need to ensure that the destruction of stockpiles take place in an open and transparent manner.

Article 3 is also important because we know that many States have signed the treaty because they want to ensure that cluster munitions will never be used against their territory or their citizens.

This is why Article 3 matters to all signatory States and future States Parties, and I would like to commend my German friends for making this conference open to, and relevant for, all States, whether they have stockpiles or not.

3. Implementing article 3

Destroying national stockpiles of cluster munitions within the eight-year deadline is the ultimate responsibility for each future State Party. But it is a collective responsibility for all States Parties to facilitate compliance with this obligation.

We know that destroying stockpiled cluster munitions represents a major challenge, both technically and logistically.

We need to avoid a situation similar to the one we face within the Mine Ban Convention, where some States Parties are in non-compliance with the stockpile destruction obligation. Therefore we need to start by focusing on the tasks and the financial, technical and logistical resources needed to complete those tasks as soon as possible, rather than start by focusing on the final deadline.

A key element in achieving this is to make use of all the opportunities for international cooperation and assistance in the Convention, and in particular explore the gains of technical cooperation both on international and on regional levels.

4. Norwegian stockpiles

Norway started the destruction of our national stocks on the 30 April this year. The early start of the destruction process is a clear sign of our intention to follow up on our international efforts with practical action at home.

Our overriding concern was to find a method for destruction that was cost-efficient, safe and environmentally friendly. The solution we settled on was to detonate the munitions in batches in a former mine situated 910 meters below the ground. To avoid contamination of the environment, the air in the mine is then filtered after each detonation.

I was myself present at the event, and it was with great satisfaction that I pushed the button that set off the detonation that destroyed the first batch of Norway's stockpile of cluster munitions.

With around 52.000 grenades to go, this process is expected to take about a year. Subsequently, the destruction process could be expected to be completed by the end of July 2010.

In Norway we have the necessary skills and the facilities to undertake the task of destroying these munitions. With so many States facing a similar task, this is an area of expertise that will be much in demand, both nationally and internationally. We chose the Nordic munitions company NAMMO to do the job, as it turned out that this was the candidate that best suited our needs in this case.

5. Retention

We recognise that there is a discussion taking place on the need to, and value of, retaining live cluster munitions for the purposes of training and research.

This is an important discussion and we would like to contribute to it by providing documentation and solid evidence-based analysis on the value and need for retaining live cluster munitions. Later at this conference you will hear a presentation on this issue by one of the leading scientific experts on cluster munitions at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment. As you will hear, the report itself doesn't draw a final conclusion about whether retention is warranted or not, but it gives a very solid set of insights into the issue.

My Government has made the decision to destroy all our stockpiles of cluster munitions as soon as possible, and not to retain any for training or research. While we note the arguments made by several in favour of retaining cluster munitions for some very specific purposes, we have decided, following close consultations with our military and humanitarian experts, that we can meet the needs for training and research through other means.

It should be noticed that the key humanitarian experts in the field – those that already take care of most of the clearance – do not train on “live” munitions.

We are concerned that retaining live cluster munitions for training and research purposes can be seen as undermining the categorical prohibition of the Convention.

We encourage other states present to take a similar decision, in order to uphold the clarity of the Convention.

Thank you for the attention, I wish you all a very successful conference.