



Statement to the Inaugural Session of the Latin American Conference on Cluster Munitions

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Outrage and excitement. These will be two crucial elements of a successful effort to ban cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians. Outrage at the devastating and long-lasting impact they have on civilians. Outrage that this devastating and long-lasting impact is highly foreseeable and predictable—yet the weapons continue to be used and to be stockpiled in staggering numbers.

But excitement that something CAN and IS being done. The Oslo Process is an undertaking of historic proportions. There is every reason to be optimistic that in roughly one year's time a treaty will be signed by a very large number of countries that will eliminate hundreds of millions of existing submunitions that threaten civilian populations and will provide a framework for assisting already affected communities and victims. This will be a crowning achievement from both a humanitarian and disarmament perspective

So outrage and excitement. I realize these words are not often associated with diplomacy, so perhaps we can settle for dedication and determination, and commitment and foresight—the foresight to see that a cluster munition treaty will be in your national interest and not just an amorphous humanitarian interest.

Costa Rica is to be congratulated for taking the initiative to host this meeting, which I am confident will be an important step in moving the Oslo Process forward toward a treaty in 2008. Our hope in the NGO community, in the Cluster Munition Coalition, is that this meeting will spur Latin American governments to act as a unified force in pursuit of that treaty. African states are often credited for the role they played in the bringing about the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and for fighting off efforts to weaken it during negotiations. Latin American states can play a similar role now.

Peru, Mexico, and Costa Rica have already shown leadership, some two-thirds of the region is already engaged in the process, and there have been encouraging statements and important developments from others in the region, notably former producers Argentina and Chile.

The Treaty of Tlatelolco is being invoked as this meeting, and for us the main relevance is that the Treaty demonstrated that Latin American governments can muster the political

will and leadership and vision to show the rest of the world the right way forward on a crucial issue of humanitarian and security concern.

The Cluster Munition Coalition has some more specific objectives in mind for this meeting as well. First, we hope to see new countries publicly stating their support for the Oslo Process and the Oslo Declaration, which commits states to try to conclude a new cluster munition treaty in 2008. We note that five states are expected here in San Jose that have not previously participated in the Oslo Process: Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Uruguay.

Second, we hope that we will hear commitments from states to pursue the strongest, most comprehensive new treaty possible. This must be a treaty that prohibits cluster munitions, not regulates them, that requires destruction of stockpiles, that does not have broad exemptions for submunitions with self-destruct devices or those with a certain failure rate under test conditions. It must be a treaty that requires clearance of contaminated areas and assistance to victims and affected communities, and one that induces cooperation and assistance with those aims. We would like to see Latin American states become the champion of a comprehensive treaty and to stand ready to oppose efforts to lessen its humanitarian impact.

Third, we hope that in the next two days we can identify possible national and regional steps to take as follow-on to this meeting, as part of moving the Oslo Process forward. This could include the concept of a regional Cluster Munition Free Zone. The declaration of a Central America Mine Free Zone in 1996 gave impetus to the mine ban movement. But to be useful, agreement would have to be reached quickly. We should not lose sight of the fact that such a zone is not an end in and of itself, it is to feed into and strengthen the Oslo Process aimed at a treaty next year.

And fourth, we hope this meeting will spur steps at the national level. We would particularly like to hear declarations from states in the region that have produced and/or stockpiled cluster munitions in the past, declarations that they have foresworn the weapon. This would include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Honduras, and Peru, and possibly Colombia and others.

We encourage all states in the region to declare immediately a national moratorium on the use, transfer, production, and stockpiling of cluster munitions, as a way of building support and momentum for the future international treaty.

In closing, let me ask you this: are you often frustrated in your job? Are you tired of your good ideas and good intentions getting blocked in multilateral for a? Do you feel like you are not making enough difference in improving the world? Here's a solution: embrace the Oslo Process, embrace it wholeheartedly, throw yourself into it, drag along your government, your agency, your organization.

With outrage and excitement, with dedication and determination and commitment from governments, international organizations and NGOs, this movement to ban cluster

munitions is going to succeed, and you will have made the world a better place than you found it. You will want to tell your children and grandchildren about it, one of the most important things you ever accomplished. But more importantly, you will have helped save the lives of countless children and grandchildren for generations to come.

Thank you.