

The Santiago Global Conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions closed today on an uplifting note. Over the past 3 days, it has been heartening to hear many States actively promoting the obligations of the Convention and assuming the roles of dedicated caretakers of the Convention.

In the informal atmosphere of the Conference, it was easy to feel the sense of continued and growing momentum behind the Convention, with good news on ratification from a number of States – over 15 which stated they expected to ratify before the 1MSP - and in the solid contributions from many more on the discussion papers which will shape the final outcome documents of the 1MSP.

Progress was made on substantive issues of stockpile destruction, clearance, victim assistance, cooperation and assistance, and transparency. In particular, the emphasis on early implementation from States was especially encouraging, along with a sense from States of their specific commitment to universalization.

While there is considerable work required on procedural and certain institutional issues before the September preparatory committee meeting, the Conference concluded with participants confident the Convention is in good shape moving ahead towards the 1MSP under the strong leadership from Lao PDR, clearly evident this week with a number of high level government officials taking an active and impressive role in the Conference.

In the last session of the Conference on international cooperation and assistance, welcome news came from Lebanon, which announced that its government has approved the Convention, and now it will only be a short while until Parliament enacts necessary legislation and it is able to complete ratification. Geneva-based Ambassador Najla Raichi Assaker made a powerful intervention on lessons learned on international cooperation from Lebanon's experience with words of encouragement for participants that, yes, 'we made it happen,' and Lebanon has been a place where we have saved lives, we have given a sense of hope and justice to victims, and now on our way to the 1MSP, we should once again beat the drum to ban cluster bombs.

Lao PDR made a presentation on cooperation and assistance in the context of its national experience, noting its recognition that work on victim assistance was lagging behind clearance. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem, Lao was taking steps to conduct a victim and accident survey to identify survivors, where accidents occur, and behaviors increasing risk. Norway presented key elements essential to effective international cooperation and assistance, pointing out that it was necessary to take a tailored approach for each affected state.

Zambia announced that with the help of the assistance it has received, it will have completed clearance by the convention's entry into force and Burundi spoke about its experience gained in mine clearance and encouraged countries to make concrete commitments to clear contaminated areas.

Vietnam, the second non-signatory to speak during the Conference, intervened to express its full support for the humanitarian aims of the Convention and to ask that international cooperation and assistance be extended to countries that had not yet signed but were still studying the Convention. Vietnam's strong delegation to the conference had numerous interactions with states, CMC campaigners and international organizations over the course of the meeting.

From traditional donor States, the UK said its funding contribution would remain at 10 million pounds per year from 2010-2013 and Australia referred to its 100 million dollar commitment to mine action over the next 5 years, which includes action to address the problem of cluster munitions. Austria encouraged that Article 6 could serve as a platform for exchange of best practices by affected States.

Khaled Yamout, NPA, delivered the CMC intervention on international cooperation and assistance, focusing on the role civil society organizations can play in assisting and facilitating the fulfillment of the obligations on the Convention. He reiterated three key messages of the CMC: 1) that all States Parties are in a position to provide assistance, both affected countries and donors; 2) that we need results and new funding, new technological assistance, and new projects will be essential to cooperation; and 3) this can be done – globally the problem is limited in scope and can be addressed within a short time, with a few notable exceptions.

Judy Grayson, UNICEF, on behalf of the UN Mine Action Team, pledged the assistance of the UN system to help States to move forward to implement the Convention. Lou Maresca, on behalf of the ICRC, described the role that the ICRC, the IFRC, and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can play in providing assistance and Vera Bohle and Erik Tollefsen spoke jointly on means of technical assistance available from the GICHD.

Further ratification news came today from Costa Rica which announced that its President has sent a request for ratification of the CCM as a priority to its Congress. Mozambique stated it is in an advanced stage of the ratification process and hoped to complete the process before the Convention's entry into force in August, while Madagascar stated that it will complete ratification without delay once its Parliament is re-established, hopefully before the end of this year.

Closing remarks were made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile, the Deputy Minister of Lao PDR, and Thomas Nash on behalf of CMC.

The Chilean Chair summarized the progress made during the Conference that will be carried forward to shape the outcome documents of the 1MSP, the Political Declaration, Vientiane Action Plan, and reporting formats, looking forward to continued progress with further inclusive and transparent participation by States and the Friends of the President.

Thomas added that we had arrived in Chile with strong base in the papers prepared by the Friends of the Presidents but would leave with an even stronger basis to continue our work. The Conference has inspired us and made us full of energy that the provisions established by the Convention can be implemented swiftly, and that the work starts now and here.

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lao noted the spirit of sincerity, straightforward manner and strong political will and commitment to the implementation of the Convention and its universalization shown during the Conference and extended an official invitation to all present to the 1MSP in Vientiane.

In closing, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile reiterated Chile's commitment to the Convention and called for support for the initiative launched by Peru for the creation of a cluster munition free zone in Latin America. He called on Peru to ratify the Convention jointly with Chile, and for others in the Organization of American States to join the initiative, which he hoped would extend through the universalization of the Convention to include the whole world. To this end, civil society is absolutely vital, to provide links to affected communities and to be an agent of dissemination at every level of society, he said, and expressly thanked on behalf of the government of Chile every member of the CMC, and specially noted the efforts of the Ban Advocates in their exemplary determinism to lead the process forward.

A well-deserved congratulation and thank you to everyone whose hard work has resulted in a very successful Conference, a much-needed stepping stone to the historic First MSP in Vientiane.

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