

**Special Event: Closing in on Entry-into-Force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions  
UN Headquarters, 21 October 2009**

**Opening remarks by  
Mr. Sergio Duarte  
UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the most important reasons that the United Nations was established was to help create a safer world—in the words of the Charter’s Preamble, “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” The Charter also identified disarmament and the regulation of armaments as specific means by which these goals could be pursued. Over the years, additional mandates in such areas as non-proliferation and counter-terrorism were added to the United Nations’ responsibilities.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control have proved to be especially challenging. However, some substantial successes were achieved in the area of international humanitarian law, such as: the Mine Ban Convention and the recent Protocol on explosive remnants of war under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Additionally, there have been other welcome developments in the field of nuclear disarmament, such as promising statements from a number of countries, including nuclear-weapon states, on the need to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. A few weeks ago, the first-ever summit exclusively devoted to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation was held in the United Nations Security Council.

These encouraging developments will help set the stage for a positive and constructive review conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty next year and the potential to make a lasting positive impact in ushering in a new era of cooperation and progress in the fields of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control—to the greater benefit of international peace and security.

There is, however, yet another encouraging event taking place next year, which will help in marking the year 2010 as a truly historic one for disarmament—namely, that the Convention on Cluster Munitions will most probably enter into force. This convention marks a major step forward in global efforts to protect civilians and to control the spread of deadly weaponry that is viewed as inherently indiscriminate and excessively injurious.

In his message to last year’s Signing Conference in Oslo, the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated that “the conclusion of [the] Convention indicates a significant and fundamental change in the position of many governments that, until recently, regarded cluster munitions as essential to their security policies and military doctrines.” He stressed that

these are impressive policy decisions, which also offer hope that States can depart from other long-held positions in the light of new evidence and new appreciation of their own interests.

The United Nations therefore sees the entry-into-force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions not only as a landmark in disarmament and humanitarian law, but as a good, wider example of what is possible in multilateral diplomacy.

As of today, the Convention on Cluster Munitions tasks the United Nations system with a number of actions and activities regarding the implementation of the Convention. These range from organizing meetings of States Parties to assisting in information exchange, clearance and mine risk education. Moreover, the Secretary-General is the depository of the Convention. He has received 23 notifications of States that wish to be bound by it. Only 7 more ratifications are needed for the Convention to enter into force, and the United Nations is looking forward to this moment -- and the subsequent first meeting of States Parties, for which Laos has so generously stepped forward to host.

Let me close by stressing that from the UN's point of view, signing up to this Convention is important for any country regardless of the existence of cluster munitions in national territory, and regardless of a possible national experience of cluster munitions attacks. There may be two overriding, universal reasons for joining this treaty: the prevention of future humanitarian tragedy, and the forceful drive in humanitarian norm-setting which emanates from global participation in the Convention. These could be reasons for every country in the world to eventually sign up to this instrument.

Thank you.