



**OPENING STATEMENT BY
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PRIME MINISTER OF THE KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA AND PRESIDENT
OF CAMBODIAN MINE ACTION AND VICTIM ASSISTANCE AUTHORITY**

**At the Opening Ceremony of the Eleventh Meeting of the States Parties
to the AP Mine Ban Convention (11MSP)**

Sunday 27 November 2011, Peace Palace, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

- Madame **HELEN CLARK**, UNDP Administrator and UNDG Chair,
- H.E. **Gazmend Turdiu**, President of the 10MSP,
- Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia and the people of Cambodia, I would like first of all to express my great pleasure and extend my warmest welcome to all representatives of States Parties and States not Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the United Nations, regional and international organizations and institutions from different continents around the world, for your presence here today to attend our Eleventh Meeting of the States Parties (11MSP) to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.

During the course of next week, Phnom Penh capital is hosting and welcoming the 11MSP, which is an important meeting in the history of disarmament.

Two years ago, Cartagena of Colombia hosted the Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention. Recognizing the progress and achievements as well as the challenges ahead, all representatives of the States Parties adopted the Cartagena Action Plan for implementation during 2010-2014. In line with the spirit of the Mine Ban Convention, the Cartagena Action Plan called for all States Parties to undertake the following salient actions:

- Resolved to achieve universal adherence to the Convention and its norms, particularly in encouraging and convincing new States to join the movement, in order to realize the goal of a world free of anti-personnel mines;
- Resolved to ensure the expeditious and timely destruction of all stockpiled anti-personnel mines;
- Resolved to ensure the clearance and release of mined areas in order to provide safe land for resettlement, for agriculture and other purposes to the affected communities;
- Resolved to provide adequate assistance to mine victims so as to meet their needs, their rehabilitation and their socio-economic integration; and
- Making greater effort to promote international cooperation, political commitments, the exchange of good practices and lessons learnt, and mobilize resources to achieve the aims of the Convention.

The Phnom Penh Progress Report 2010-2011 which our meeting is going to adopt towards the end of the next week will assess the achievements made during the past year.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation and congratulations to Norway and Albania for their respective presidencies in 2009 and 2010, during which they have coordinated, monitored and fostered the implementation of the Cartagena Action Plan.

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Lok Chumteav,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Starting tomorrow Cambodia is going to assume its presidency of the 11MSP to the Ottawa Convention and will lead the work of the Convention during the course of 2012.

For Cambodia, this presidency is a privilege to serve and a major responsibility to fulfill. And for the mine ban movement, it is a special and unique milestone. With the 11MPS in Phnom Penh, the Convention is returning to a place where it all started 20 years ago from human tragedy and suffering of the victims in Cambodia as well as in similar regions of Mozambique, Angola, Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the commitment to put an end to these inhumane and deadly weapons was born.

Cambodia's past tragedy was a unique tragedy of the most severe magnitude.

The legacy of landmines in Cambodia was closely linked with the history of our tragedy which Cambodia had gone through from the mid 60s to the late 90s. It was the darkest period in the Cambodian history, during which the country was torn apart by a series of regional wars, domestic armed conflicts, and genocidal regime which then saw a secessionist movement and national disunity. Even after gunfire had long ended, this tragedy is still prolonged with the sounds of mine blast, the outcry of victims and tragic sadness of families and communities.

As our people need to restore their livelihoods and the economy in the aftermath of decades of destruction by wars, especially right after we achieved national reconciliation and integration thanks to the win-win policy of the Royal Government of Cambodia, mines

and unexploded ordinance are still an obstacle to Cambodia's development and the return of our people's living to its normalcy.

The history of mine clearance and the release of land for agricultural production began after the liberation of the country from the Pol Pot genocidal regime in the early 1979, where Ms. Kong Saroeun became a national heroine for having bravely led a mine-clearance company to remove landmines in the eastern part of the country. Humanitarian demining formally commenced since 1992 in order to provide safe land to more than 350,000 repatriates under the Paris Peace Agreement.

With the different phases of bringing peace to the country, the opening of new territories previously under the control of conflicting parties and the emerging opportunities in new road corridors as well as the expansion of arable land, mines problem has become complex and a key priority in our national development agenda. With the increase in the number of demining operators, the expansion of clearance effort coupled with the need for mine risk education for people living in the mine affected communities as well as the need to assist the victims, it became necessary that a national institution be set up to regulate, formulate policy, coordinate and monitor the whole mine action sector. For these reasons the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority, of which I am the Chairman, was established. In line with this vision, the Royal Government of Cambodia decided to introduce the ninth Cambodia's Millennium Development Goal to complement the 8 goals of the United Nations in order to put an end to the menace caused by mines. Last year the Royal Government of Cambodia adopted a National Mine Action Strategy for 2010-2019 to guide the whole mine action sector, which is aligned and harmonized with the national policy and strategy and demonstrates Cambodia's ownership in this important sector.

With the restructuring of the sector and expansion of its underlying activities, especially the increase in effort in clearing mines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance (UXO), the number of annual casualties from mines and UXOs has significantly declined from 4,320 in 1996 to an average of 800 during 2000-2004 and down below 300 during the last 3 years, thanks to the technical and financial support that various development partners have extended to Cambodia. Based on the first 10 months of casualty record this year, the number could decline to 152. If the current trend is maintained during the last 2 months of this year, it will be the first time that the number of casualties is below the level of 200 since the country was unified.

Cambodia's experiences in overcoming severe impact of landmines and UXOs and remarkable achievements we have made could be invaluable lessons, which can be shared with all participants at this 11MSP.

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Lok Chumteav,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the outset, Cambodia has always been at the forefront of the mine ban movement, in which Cambodian landmine survivors, including Miss Song Kosal and Mr. Tun Channareth, were playing a key role in convincing leaders of many countries to join the Ottawa Convention.

Our former monarch King-Father Norodom Sihanouk and His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni of Cambodia have always extended their full support to the movement and action to ban landmines.

I would also like to recall that in 1995 the Royal Government of Cambodia also signed a petition calling for a ban on anti-personnel mines.

The dispatch of Cambodian de-mining units to Sudan and Lebanon within the framework of the UN peacekeeping missions also demonstrated Cambodia's humble contribution to scaling down the casualties caused by landmines in other parts of the world. It also reflects Cambodia's commitment and determination against the use of anti-personnel mines at anywhere, any time and for any purpose.

Your Royal Highness, Lok Chumteav, Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, the Convention has returned to where it all started 20 years ago.

It is a unique opportunity for all of us to jointly review the path we have chosen, review the progress we have made and the challenge ahead of us as we aim to achieve the goal of the Convention.

It also provides us a chance to recall that although hundreds of millions of square meters have been released, millions of mines have been destroyed and the number of casualties has substantially decreased; mines remain our problem to solve day and night until our mission is fulfilled.

The presence of Madame Helen Clark, a high-ranking official and esteemed representative of the United Nations, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen who are the representatives of States Parties, States not Parties, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other institutions here today is a testimony of our bold determination and

strong commitment to put an end to the suffering and tragedy caused by landmines.

I also would like to take this solemn opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all relevant development partners, organizations and institutions concerned for their unfettered support and priceless contribution to Cambodia's effort to reduce the casualties caused by mines and UXO. My sincere thanks must also go to all key players in mine action sector including demining operators, mine-victim rescuers and caretakers as well as mine-risk educators for their devotion and dedication to relieve the suffering and hardship caused by mines.

I also highly commend the firm solidarity among all States Parties to the Convention, all concerned international and non-governmental organizations and all stakeholders, who have collectively and jointly work towards our noble cause for **A Mine-Free World**.

In this era of economic difficulty and uncertainty, the roads ahead of us in implementing the obligations of the Convention and what we have promised to our respective States, the victims and survivors will be rough. However, we cannot be deterred and our accomplishment should not be compromised by the financial turmoil. For our presidency, we intend to carry on the mandate and priority that our predecessors have set, especially in the area of victim assistance as much as in further promoting the international cooperation and assistance particularly south-south cooperation among States and key stakeholders, as we believe this will be best model of cooperation in the face of the current challenge going forward. Without intensifying the speed and efficiency of the way in which we address our respective problems, our ultimate goal of a mine-free world will remain in a distance.

May I wish the 11MSP to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction a fruitful meeting and a brilliant success. I also wish you all a pleasant stay in Cambodia.

Thank you!