



Ninth Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the
Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of
Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

Geneva, 24 – 28 November 2008

Opening Statement by Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga , President
Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining
(GICHD)

Since the entry into force of the Convention I have had the honour to participate in the annual meetings of States parties. I am very pleased to be with you today. It is, as usual, an occasion to welcome the progress made in the implementation of the Convention and to discuss the challenges ahead.

In 1997, 121 States gathered to sign the treaty banning anti-personnel mines. What could have easily been perceived as a vain dream in the early 90s became reality. Like many of you here today, I witnessed this signing ceremony. I was convinced that the birth of the Ottawa Convention would lead not only to a ban on the production and use of antipersonnel landmines, but also to the clearance of mined areas and the release of land allowing the affected communities to return to a normal life. Today, there are good reasons to believe that the core aims of the Convention will soon be met.

Many positive results have been achieved:

- Universalisation is progressing
- More States have destroyed their stockpiles
- New countries have declared themselves free of mines

However, I am sure, you will agree that considerable work remains to be done. There are still thousands of victims a year. This is absolutely unacceptable. Not only must be reduced the number of victims to zero, but the support to the survivors must be enhanced. The social rehabilitation must remain a priority. Victim assistance should be a priority in national health plans of affected countries. Besides the humanitarian impact, the impediment to development created by antipersonnel mines is of great concern, even more so nowadays that food security issues are vitally important. We cannot remain passive when we know that thousands of square kilometers of affected land could, once cleared, be used for agriculture purpose and other valuable economic activity.

On the 1st of March 2009, we will celebrate the 10 years of the entry into force of the Ottawa Treaty. This anniversary will also mark the expiry of clearance deadlines for the first ratifying States. Some of them will not have managed to meet this deadline. This is very regrettable indeed! Special attention will have to be paid to those States requesting an extension of their Article 5 deadline. National commitment, as well as mutual assistance according to Article 6, are and will remain key on the road to full achievement of the Convention's aims.

And furthermore let us not forget that the universalisation of the Convention must continue to be a priority – absolute priority – for us all.

Vous ne pourrez que partager mon souci qu'un grand effort reste à faire pour atteindre les buts que la communauté internationale s'est fixée il y a 10 ans.

Il faudra notamment redoubler d'énergie pour réduire les vastes zones suspectées d'être touchées par le fléau des mines antipersonnel. Encore trop de moyens sont aujourd'hui déployés dans des zones où pas la moindre mine n'est trouvée. Des outils d'analyse ont été développés ces dernières années – notamment par le CIDHG. A travers des méthodes techniques, mais aussi un dialogue soutenu avec les populations concernées, il est possible de réduire considérablement les zones suspectes et permettre ainsi la restitution des terres aux communautés.

Dans ce contexte il faudra aussi s'assurer que l'action contre les mines contribue au développement parmi les communautés touchées. En marge de cette Conférence, le CIDHG – dans le cadre du lien entre l'action contre les mines et le développement - va lancer des lignes directrices destinées aux programmes nationaux, aux ONG et aux agences officielles de développement qui visent à renforcer la coordination entre les acteurs de ces deux domaines.

Sous peu, le continent américain pourrait être déclaré libre des mines antipersonnel. C'est l'illustration que les objectifs de la Convention font leur œuvre et qu'une région entière peut être libérée de la menace de ces armes.

Dans d'autres régions, des efforts considérables devront encore être déployés. Je pense par exemple à mes amis africains dont les terres sont gravement polluées par ces armes. Je tiens ici à saluer la tenue du premier séminaire des acteurs africains francophones de la lutte contre les mines, organisé au mois d'octobre de cette année au Bénin avec le soutien du CIDHG. Réunissant 14 pays, ce séminaire a permis un échange de vue entre les différents programmes de lutte contre les mines sur les défis auxquels ils sont chacun confrontés, mais aussi sur les moyens de les surmonter.

Une telle approche régionale me paraît intéressante et pourrait être développée ailleurs. Je suis persuadé, et vous en conviendrez sans doute, que les progrès réalisés dans la mise en œuvre des objectifs de la Convention se nourrissent de l'échange d'expérience en matière de lutte contre les mines. Si chaque pays présente des particularités, il n'en demeure pas moins que les solutions adoptées par certains sont reproductibles chez d'autres.

Laissez moi mentionner dans ce contexte l'action courageuse de l'Appel de Genève par rapport au groupes armés non étatiques.

While we will soon celebrate the 10 years of the entry into force of the Convention, I am glad to see that the important issue of cluster munitions is now being tackled. It is my hope that this anniversary year will coincide with the entry into force of the new treaty on cluster munitions. I am convinced that this accord will contribute to a world not only free of cluster munitions but also free of new victims. The Oslo process is, in many aspects, similar to the process which led to the

Ottawa Convention: both landmines and cluster munitions are indiscriminate weapons which have caused and still cause horrific and unacceptable humanitarian harm.

My friends, I am sure you agree that we are living a remarkable moment in the history of international humanitarian law. The entry into force of this new Convention will be a major step in the broader fight against conventional indiscriminate weapons that have maimed and killed so many civilians for decades. It is your duty, the duty of all of you present in the room today – governmental delegates, representatives of international and non-governmental organizations, voices of the civil society - to remain engaged, to provide all the efforts to make sure that the new treaty will be fully implemented. This is a challenge for the international community and in particular for the mine action community. Besides the political will, there will be a need for increased cooperation between the various actors involved. The GICHD will continue to work and cooperate closely with you on the way forward to a world free of cluster munitions.

2008 is my last year as President of the GICHD. It is not an easy moment for me, since mine action in the largest sense of the word has accompanied me since 1994, when I launched – as President of the ICRC – the appeal for a total ban on landmines. After 15 years of strong commitment, the time has come to terminate my active association with the mine action community. However, I am profoundly happy to be able, for good reasons, to trust on you in the implementation of future steps leading to a world free of these indiscriminate weapons and free of new victims.

Let me conclude by saying

RES, NON VERBA!

DES ACTES PLUS QUE DES MOTS!

DEEDS, NOT WORDS!