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Opening of the 9th Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty, on 24 November 2008 in Geneva

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure to speak to you today and to wish you on behalf of the Federal Council and the people of Switzerland a warm welcome to Geneva for the 9th Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty.

Since the very beginning of this collective effort for a world free of the scourge of antipersonnel mines, Switzerland's constant commitment has been an integral part of its policy on promoting peace and human security. It is also an essential part of its activities in the areas of humanitarian aid and development co-operation.

Switzerland shares the deep humanitarian conviction – as expressed in the Mine Ban Treaty - that both civilian populations and combatants alike must no longer be subjected to the mortal danger of antipersonnel mines and their devastating consequences.

Through their commitment to achieve the aims of the Treaty, the States Parties have set out on a path that will lead us to the day when there will be no more mines and no more victims. To achieve this, we need the commitment of every State – not just those represented here at this meeting today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The successes of the last ten years are the result of the combined efforts of the international community and many non-governmental organisations, but in spite of these efforts we find ourselves at a crossroads. We, the States Parties, are now confronted with the

obligations that we committed ourselves to when we acceded to the Treaty. The moment is decisive because these obligations are crucial to the fulfilment of the promise of a world free of land mines. From 2009 onwards, a large number of land-mine affected countries will face the deadlines set in the Mine Ban Treaty. Some States have not been able to complete this task in the ten years available to them, and have already asked for an extension – which the Treaty permits.

At this meeting, the States Parties will examine and consider the requests for extensions of 15 States Parties that must clear their territories of mines by 2009. This is a very high number.

The existence of the possibility of an extension, even if it realistically takes into account the obstacles preventing the clearance of mine fields, is not without risks for the implementation of the Treaty. The States Parties understand that the deadline of 10 years set in the Treaty must be respected because the text of the Treaty clearly requires the destruction of all antipersonnel mines on the territory of the States concerned. Requests for extensions to this deadline are possible, in accordance with article 5 of the Treaty, but they must be considered as exceptions. However, as the first deadline approaches, the large number of States making this request has started to erode the exceptional nature of the provision made in article 5. Switzerland has argued that this procedure be reserved strictly for exceptional cases and that extensions be granted only after a close examination on the basis of a serious commitment by the country concerned.

By taking on the presidency of the Meeting of States Parties at such a crucial moment, Switzerland has accepted the responsibility of ensuring respect for this commitment. The requests for extensions have already been subjected to serious in-depth analysis by the working group set up for this purpose, headed by Prince Mired Raad Al-Hussein of Jordan, president of the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of States Parties. The work of the Meeting this week must enable us to complete the task. It is up to the States now to take the decisions confronting them, taking into account the importance of the commitments they have undertaken and to maintain the high standards. It is important because at stake is the credibility of the Treaty and the impact of the Treaty on the people whose lives are affected by antipersonnel mines.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first and most important thing we have to do is to ensure that antipersonnel mines disappear from our arsenals. Article 4 of the Treaty stipulates that stocks of all such weapons must be destroyed within four years. Several States have announced this year that they have honoured their commitments in this respect, which, it should not be forgotten, is combined with considerable financial outlays. On this matter, there is however no possibility of seeking extensions, and in order to uphold the credibility of the Treaty it is necessary that some states that have missed their deadlines take the urgent steps required of them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is only through the participation of all States that we will achieve the target of a world free of antipersonnel mines.

To date, 156 States have joined the Treaty and this number is growing steadily. One year ago, at the Meeting of States Parties that took place in Jordan, we celebrated the accession of two new States from the Middle East. This year we cannot say as much even if we would like to have counted among the States Parties, those countries which now have only a small step to make before being able to rejoin the Treaty.

Important and major powers remain outside the Treaty, a situation which demands that we redouble our efforts to convince them to accede. The fact that ten years after the signing of the Treaty almost half the world's population still do not benefit from its protection makes all the more urgent the need for these States to come on board and participate in the struggle. I appeal to all States to unite behind this humanitarian commitment and to give the Treaty the truly universal character it must have.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have witnessed this year an essential breakthrough in the struggle against cluster munitions with the adoption of a new international treaty that will be signed on 3 December this year in Oslo by several countries including Switzerland. The collaboration between States and civil society in the process leading to this treaty can be compared to that which led to the adoption of the Ottawa Convention. When the new treaty is implemented it will be important to use all possible synergies with existing mechanisms for applying the Mine Ban Treaty. This will allow for the optimal use of resources in the fight against the humanitarian

consequences of antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions – which are essentially the same.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The commitment of States to renounce the use of antipersonnel mines is indispensable but, alone, not sufficient to prevent these weapons causing further casualties. Dozens of non-state armed groups continue to use antipersonnel mines - often on the territory of States that are party to the Mine Ban Treaty and which are on the right path to meeting their obligations. For the victims, however, it makes no difference whether the mines are laid by government soldiers or by armed rebel groups. To achieve truly universal adherence to the norms of the Treaty, it is vitally important that non-state actors can be persuaded to renounce the use of antipersonnel mines. Only in this way - and my thanks go in particular to the work of NGOs such as 'Geneva Call' - will we be able to improve the situations of affected populations and prevent new victims. Adopting the *deed of commitment*, the instrument of Geneva Call is a first step in the right direction and which must be followed up by implementation and verification. Support from States Parties for the work of non-governmental organisations is indispensable in assisting affected populations in the territories under the control of armed non-state groups and in persuading such groups to forgo antipersonnel mines.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the presidency of the 9th Meeting of the States Parties, Switzerland, feels entrusted with a great responsibility, and it wants to demonstrate its full solidarity with the affected countries and the victims of antipersonnel mines.

If we want to ensure that mines and other explosive remnants of war no longer kill and maim innocent people we must make local populations more aware of the dangers they are exposed to; we must clear mined fields and we must restore this land to productive use, to agriculture and the pursuit of sustainable development.

Since the Ottawa Conference in 1997, Switzerland has given special attention to helping the victims, and has contributed to developing a concept of victim assistance.

States which have reported the existence of significant numbers of mine victims must - with the assistance of international co-operation - put in

place effective plans and set national objectives to meet their needs, provide access to high-quality first aid and improve the socio-economic reintegration of the survivors. It is a recognised right of the victims and their families to receive medical aid and psychological support, as well as help with their socio-economic re-integration. The adoption in 2007 of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities constitutes concrete assistance to achieving the objectives that the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention set out in the area of victim assistance.

Antipersonnel mines and explosive remnants of war also present formidable challenges for development, as the Nairobi Action Plan acknowledged in 2004. The development of many communities is impeded, access to schools, to fields, to roads are made difficult or even impossible. Efforts to reduce poverty are also hindered as a result. It is therefore crucially important that the humanitarian action plans against mines also take on a developmental perspective and that, vice versa, development projects take into account the problem of explosive remnants of war, including victim assistance.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation and my admiration of all those who have been actively involved for years in attaining the objective of a world free of antipersonnel mines and their consequences. I am thinking in particular of the UN, the ICRC and its Special Fund for the Disabled, of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, as well as many non-governmental organisations. I am also thinking of all those people who devote their lives to the service of mine action, and in particular of the positive and committed role of the victims, who are the key players in the struggle to overcome this evil.

And now, it is up to us to translate our words into action and to honour our commitments!

Thank you for your attention.