

Statement made by Belgium, coordinator of the Universalization contact group

Phnom Penh, December 1st 2011

Mr. Chairman,

Let me start by expressing my sincere appreciation to Canada for its long term commitment to the cause of Universalization. My thanks also go to HRH Prince Mired of JORDAN, the President's Special Envoy on Universalization and my colleague Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu of Albania, the President of the 10th MSP, both supported by the ISU as well as to the campaigners from ICBL and the ICRC.

Until recently and for the past three years, we have observed an apparent standstill in the universalization process. Today we take note with pleasure of two more accessions: Tuvalu and South Sudan. We commend these two countries for this excellent decision.

We were also pleased to hear Finland announcing at the beginning of this conference that the parliamentary ratification process has been successfully concluded and that very soon now Finland will accede to the Convention.

Poland, as a State Party, reiterated its intention to ratify the Convention in 2012 and informed us on the relevant Parliamentary proceedings that are underway.

We believe that these positive developments and announcements will give a new momentum to the universal promotion of our Convention.

On a personal note, allow me to express my deep desire to register a European Union, free of all antipersonnel mines by the end of 2012. Such a state of affairs would further enhance the legitimacy of the EU mine action, fully synchronize the political commitment of the EU with the available European financial instruments, and hopefully also inspire other regions to invest in region-wide adherence to the Convention. We call upon States parties to further invest in the concept of regional universalization champions and in this regard welcome new initiatives.

The Ottawa convention is frequently referred to as a pivotal universal standard in international humanitarian law. But being the reference norm is not sufficient. Belgium is still convinced that universal adherence to legally binding commitments is indispensable to achieve a world free of mines. Once again at this conference and during the field trips, we have witnessed the positive visibility for States both within as well as outside of the Ottawa Convention as a result of their generous stemming from sponsoring of mine ban related activities. The next logical step should be for all to adherence to our Convention.

Using landmines today is subject to immediate broad public condemnation. Countries outside of the Convention are becoming aware of the consequences of acting against an almost universal instrument of international humanitarian law. We should not lose sight of the fact that in the current unstable security environment in some regions, regimes under pressure may feel tempted, more than before, to disregard our standards. The recent past has shown us some regrettable examples of this risk. A careful analysis of events in unstable regions may lead us to draw operational conclusions also regarding the universalization of our Convention. We should seize every opportunity, for instance by calling upon newly installed governments to correct a negative public image that may have resulted from action undertaken under the previous regimes. These calls could be usefully accompanied by concrete assistance commitments on the part of the Ottawa signatory States. Civil society and NGO action should go hand in hand with diplomatic initiatives, the latter often being of a more discrete but in no way less effective nature.

The provisions regarding universalization in the Cartagena action plan are very clear and we should stick to the agreed objectives. I take this opportunity to remind colleagues that every State Party has the responsibility to promote and universalize the treaty. I would like to thank wholeheartedly all States Parties that have been active on universalization. It may be worthwhile considering using our national declarations to exchange as concrete information as possible on actions undertaken, in particular those carried out at a political level. Such transparency would allow us to increase the efficiency of our universalization efforts through better synchronization and targeting of our demarches, avoiding duplication or too dispersed action.

The key question is not so much how to increase the number of outreach activities but rather their political level, impact and effectiveness. Since the decision to adhere to the Ottawa Convention is essentially a political one, we may wish to take a fresh look at new opportunities to bring our universalization campaign at the required political level. Promoting adherence to the Ottawa Convention should be part of our mainstream foreign policy. This could be one of those concrete actions I had in mind when speaking earlier about the relevance of full EU adherence to the Convention and of similar developments in other regions.

From 20 to 22 September 2011, paving the way to the 11th MSP, the Cambodian Mine Action Authority hosted in collaboration with the ICRC and the UNDP a Regional Seminar on “Addressing the Human Cost of Anti-Personnel Landmines.”

The purpose of the event was summed up by H.E. Prak Sokhonn in his opening remarks when he said that he wanted the seminar “*to be a forum for dialogue and exchange of views, so that all States and key actors could cooperate and collaborate together, be they parties or not parties to the Convention.*”

The seminar involved the participation of eleven Asian States. As such, the event had an undeniable and appreciated universalization objective. The high visibility that your country will have as host to the 2012 ASAEN summit may offer another important opportunity.

As coordinator for universalization, I would like to draw your attention to the situation of some country specific cases:

- **Regarding Libya:** The ISU wrote to the Permanent Representative of Libya in Geneva to recall that all States are welcome to take part in the Convention’s meetings and to note the optimism that is felt by many regarding the April declaration by the Transitional Council not to use mines. My authorities are preparing a brief for the Belgian Ambassador, when fully reinstated in Tripoli, to act in cooperation with all interested partners and to carry out diplomatic demarches in order to promote the Convention.
- **Sri Lanka:** following on HRH Prince Mired’s outreach, the Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka asked to defer the proposed visit to a mutually convenient date next year. Such visit would allow us to further explore some positive signs already received. Let me use this opportunity to, once more, congratulate Prince Mired for his personal efforts.
- **Tonga:** Tonga’s Chief Secretary and Secretary to the Cabinet wrote to the Director of the ISU announcing that the Cabinet will proceed with the final approval so that it can start the process leading to depositing the Instrument of Accession to the Convention.
- **Micronesia and Marshall Islands:** the recent accession of Tuvalu can be seen as instrumental in encouraging these countries to equally accede soon to the Convention.

I want to underscore once more the specific relevance of international and regional organizations in the context of universalization efforts. States Parties that are members of such organizations should consider using the full potential of their membership. To give you just one example: the Belgian Mission to the OSCE has promoted the Convention at a meeting in June last at the occasion of the visit of the 10th MSP President to the OSCE.

We may also wish to explore the potential of combined action at the level of our local diplomatic missions in Non States Parties when we intend to undertake a universalization demarche. Locally based informal networks can offer real added value, while it allows for pooling of information and resources. One such example occurred last month at the occasion of your visit as 11th MSP President to Singapore. The Belgian Ambassador then hosted a working lunch to give local colleague an opportunity to share views with you, evaluate together the results of your demarche and consider further steps in jointly promoting the Convention.

Wherever possible, Belgian diplomatic missions are open for such contacts and joined efforts with all interested colleagues, including consulting with local mine ban campaigners and NGO's.

We also recall initiatives aimed at engaging with non-state armed groups, working towards a mine ban and supporting humanitarian mine action in areas controlled or influenced by such groups, in line with action 43 the of Cartagena Action Plan. While being aware of the complexity of this type of interaction, such approaches can increase the protection of civilians during armed conflict.

Regarding States which have sent a voluntary report, based on article 7 of the Convention, we would like to hope that this cooperative step will lead them to full accession to the Convention.

Belgium highly appreciates your energetic leadership as 11th MSP President. I am looking forward to fruitful cooperation with you on universalization matters.

This concludes my report as coordinator of the Universalization Contact Group.

Mr. Chairman,

As Belgium is also member of the universalization team for the Convention on Cluster Munitions, I would like to take this opportunity to call on all States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions. While acknowledging the country specific circumstances, we strongly belief in the political advantage for all States to develop their human security policy in an integrated and mutually reinforcing way, creating room for all relevant international instruments to achieve the humanitarian objectives we all share.