



HOLY SEE

Intervention of
Monsignor Francesco CAO MINH-DUNG

Head of the Delegation of the Holy See
at the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition
of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of
Anti-Personnel Mines on their Destruction
(The Ottawa Convention)

Bangkok, 15 - 19 September 2003

Mr. President,

At the beginning of the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, the Delegation of the Holy See would like to express its felicitations to you, and to assure you of our cooperation so that this meeting may be a success for all the Parties concerned and all the communities affected by the problem of anti-personnel mines. We would like to thank especially the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Thailand for the warm welcome and for the facilities they have offered. We are particularly pleased to note the successful destruction of anti-personnel landmine stockpiles by the Government of Thailand, completed last May. Thailand now joins the many other States Parties who have completely destroyed their stockpiles. There is still, however, a great need to help Thailand clear mines and assist mine victims, financially or with technical assistance.

The Ottawa Convention is an example of an international instrument that, in its intention and its application, is a response to a very tragic reality that the International Community cannot ignore. The basis for confronting this challenge is found within the context of "multilateralism", that is, international cooperation, shared responsibility, the involvement of civil society, the direct concern of local communities - for which this effort is being made - and respect for obligations contracted. These elements of multilateralism remain the foundation for the success of all endeavor undertaken on an international level. Certainly, the family of Nations can be pleased that this initiative is underway.

The 2003 Landmine Monitor Report, presented to us by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, contains a number of significant findings. The news of new accessions and ratifications since the Fourth Meeting of States Parties, is especially welcome, as well as the continuation of a de facto ban on trade in anti-personnel landmines among States. The increase in mine action donations over the past year, mostly directed to Afghanistan, have also been a positive sign. Most importantly, there have been fewer mine victims in the majority of mine-affected countries. Unfortunately, not enough assistance is available for the care and rehabilitation of existing mine survivors, although they are among the main objectives of this Convention.

Even though we can all take satisfaction for these positive development, it is necessary to speak about the challenges that remain. The humanitarian objectives of the Convention are the core projects that cannot be forgotten. The assistance to the victims and their rehabilitation in the socio-economic life are absolute priorities. The victims will need special attention for many more years, even for decades to come. The assistance to the victims cannot be dissociated from the effort made for development. Most of the victims live in countries affected by war and extreme poverty. The most important element is to listen to these communities and persons which are affected by the problem, and together with them, to respond in an adequate way to their immediate and long term needs.

Mr. President,

The destruction of stockpiles seems to be progressing following the timetable fixed by the Convention. But the removal of the landmines is still a crucial challenge not only for the countries affected, but also for those who are not. If we want to free millions of people, whole communities and dozens of countries from the wrath of the anti-personnel mines, closer cooperation, more important technical and financial help are needed. If we want the development of many regions to become a reality, then the States Parties that have signed the Convention must double their efforts and use the means necessary to accelerate the removal of mines. If we want the children of the 21st century to live without the fear of death or harm, then a new surge of generosity and humanity is needed. To be ever more conscious of our responsibility will help the thousands of actual victims and save thousands of potential ones as well.

The challenges are immense, however, the means to respond to them are available. The Holy See considers the process of preparation of the first Review Conference in Nairobi as very important. This Conference is our next step on the long, difficult but hopeful journey to a world without personnel mines. The firm resolution of all the parties concerned to respect the spirit and the letter of the Convention is the absolute prerequisite that will help find concrete solutions to attain our objectives. To make our Convention universal must still be our priority. Important States that produce anti-personnel mines and countries that are affected at large must find the interest to become members and must be included in the general effort made for world without mines.

Mr. President,

Nothing can justify the use of weapons that kill, maim or wound indiscriminately, that affect civilian populations long after conflicts have ended, and that prevent the development of war-torn areas. Now is the time, and it is urgent that we repair the errors of the past. We would like to hope that humanity will not repeat the mistakes when making similar choices concerning weapons. Only peace, justice and development are able to create, on the national and international level, the conditions of real security for all.

Thank you.