

Mme. President, distinguished colleagues, dear friends,

Let me at the outset express my satisfaction with the fact that the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention is being held here in Bangkok, Thailand, the capital of the first country in Southeast Asia to have signed and ratified the Ottawa Convention. As a country with some 2,500 square km of mine suspected area, Thailand was quick to recognize the importance of this Treaty not only for itself but also for the world community, especially for the more than 80 other countries which are "mine affected" as well. In Thailand the words "mine action" have their full meaning, as some of us witnessed on Sunday during our field trip to the mine clearance site in Sar Keaw province. We would also like to use this opportunity to warmly thank Ambassador Lint for lending his knowledge, experience and especially his good will to the goals of our Convention, primarily its universalisation and enforcement. We wish Ambassador Lint all the best in his new duties and challenges ahead, and we hope and trust that he will not abandon us completely.

Mme. President,

From the very beginning this Convention set for itself a very ambitious program: destruction of all mines stored in stockpiles; demining of all national territories contaminated with mines; comprehensive assistance to and rehabilitation of all mine victims; and lastly, a total ban on the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of anti-personnel mines. While the realization of the first of our goals has been more than successful, we recognize that the fulfillment of the second goal will need the investment of much more energy and engagement of many more international players so that timetables set by the Convention can actually be implemented. With regard to the third goal allow me to remind you that financial contributions for rehabilitation of landmine survivors have been stagnant over the last two years. Having in mind the constant increase in the total number of mine victims whose rehabilitation and reintegration will remain with us in the decades to come, we should be deeply concerned at the decreasing resources available. On a positive note, Croatia is pleased with the progress the Convention has made on the road to universalization, and wishes to express its satisfaction that, in our opinion, the Convention has succeeded in creating a new international norm, one to which over two-thirds of the globe is already party to.

Mme. President,

The reforms this Convention is faced with and which have been extensively debated over the past months, in our eyes, are crucial to the future development of mine action in general and to this Convention in particular. We fear that if the work of the Convention does not become more attuned to the actual needs of the mine action community, both on the national and international levels, we run the risk of attrition and ultimately stagnation. We welcome the ongoing consultations taking place concerning possible changes to the inner structure of the Convention, including on the time and number of annual meetings of State Parties as well as Intercessional meetings. Croatia intends to follow closely these developments and to take an active part in them.

Croatia's commitment to the goals of the Convention is firm. In the working mechanisms of the Convention we have had the opportunity to serve as Co-Chair for Stockpile Destruction, and indeed to destroy our own stockpile some four and a half months ahead of our deadline. This week, along with Australia, we will assume the position of Co-Chair of the Committee on Victim Assistance and Socioeconomic Reintegration. In doing so, Croatia wishes to express its strong commitment to the special needs of landmine survivors in their daily struggle for full rehabilitation and reintegration in society. We stand ready to undertake all that is necessary to help make a success of this comprehensive task. In implementing its mandate, Croatia will work together with NGO's as well as with government and international organizations to continue to encourage mine affected countries to report on challenges that lie before them, as well as on their achievements in this field. We will certainly make use of the questionnaire drawn up by our predecessors which helps affected states report on their problems, current situation and future plans concerning victim assistance. We will also continue to follow the good practice of this Committee of engaging all relevant actors, from donor states to competent international organizations, in its work.

In concluding this brief overview of the status and operation of the Convention and of our Committee, I would like to stress that Croatia appreciates the exemplary work of the Implementation Support Unit, headed by Mr. Kerry Brinkert. Without their dedication, we surely would not have this level of organizational excellence and meticulous functioning in administrative matters.

Mme. President,

A few words regarding mine action in my own country. Under the leadership of the Croatian Mine Action Center, in the first eight months of 2003, 140 square kilometers of mine suspected land was returned to use. This is more than was achieved in the entire year of 2002, and already represents the fulfillment of the national plan for 2003. Also, during this time almost 160 kilometers of mined area were marked and fenced, in addition to the continuing surveillance and maintenance of signs on earlier marked areas.

We would like to emphasize that this success would not have been possible without the financial commitment of the Croatian Government. In 2003, this entailed just under 30 million US \$ from the state budget or, some 80 to 85 % of total resources spend on mine action in Croatia. At the same time, Croatia is fortunate to report a marked decrease in the number of mine victims for 2003. In the eight months of this year, only three incidents, one fatal and two injuries were registered. Although both "luck and guardian angels" must have played a part, it is clear that the broad media campaign launched by the Government in collaboration with a number of NGO's and the rigorous marking and fencing of mine suspected areas have indeed also played their part.

With such undeniable evidence of success, we were both surprised and disappointed that 2003. thus far has been marked by a low influx of donor contributions. Allow me to use this occasion and these results as a reminder to the donor community that Croatia firmly believes that it can complete the demining of its national territory in line with the deadline set by the Ottawa Convention. However, even though the Government of Croatia is shouldering some 85 % of the financial

burden, we will continue to need that remaining 15 or 20 % to complete our job on time.

Mme. President,

Before concluding I would like to reiterate our invitation extended at the last Intercessional Meeting in Geneva, to hold 2005 Meeting of States Parties of the Ottawa Convention directly following the Review Conference in Zagreb, Croatia. Croatia was one of the first 10 signatories and among the original 40 countries whose signature and ratification brought the Convention into force. Moreover, Croatia has already hosted two regional events on mine action: the Zagreb Regional Conference on Anti-Personnel Mines in June 1999 and the Regional Seminar on Humanitarian Mine Action in Dubrovnik in October 2002. In addition Croatia has played a full and active role in both the formal and informal working mechanisms of the Convention. *I believe that everyone is well aware of our active and positive roles in the fields of victim assistance and socio-economic reintegration, and stockpile destruction.* As a country heavily contaminated with antipersonell mines and a great recipient of donations but also a country which largely through its own efforts and resources is solving its mine related problems and increasingly offering assistance to other mined countries, we are well positioned this important meeting. Lastly, I would like to add that never in the history of the Convention has a meeting of States Parties been held in Eastern Europe.

Mme. President, once again let me express my congratulations to you for the excellent organization of this meeting. Allow mw to also express my admiration and gratitude for the exceeding wormth with which your country and your people have recived us. My hope is that meetings such as this one will help bring us closer to the realization of our primary goal: a world free of the terror of landmines, a world in which people with varying abilities and disabilities will have the garantied right to rehabilitation and social reintegration.. We stand ready to do our part.

Thank you, Mme. President