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**Eighth Meeting of the States Parties
to the Mine Ban Convention**

**Opening Statement by H.E. Ms Caroline Millar
President of the Seventh Meeting of the States Parties**

Sunday 18 November 2007

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to take this opportunity to take stock of progress in implementing the Convention and all we have accomplished this past year.

In my opening statement to the 7MSP, I set out Australia's firm commitment to the Convention and plans for our presidency.

It was Australia's objective to use its term to further the Convention's humanitarian and disarmament aims and address significant challenges.

Over the last year, we the states parties have made significant headway in this regard.

Universalisation

When I assumed the Presidency, I made a commitment to promote the Convention bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally.

Delegates will recall that Australia issued a *President's Action Plan to Universalise and Implement the Convention* at the 7MSP.

I am please to report that Australia has taken concrete action in respect of the Action Plan.

I have written to all states not parties to the Convention, encouraging ratification or accession without delay.

I have placed great emphasis on promoting the Convention in universal forums, where its successes can be brought to the attention of states not parties.

During the United Nations General Assembly's First Committee last year, I held a presentation on the work of the Convention to New York-based disarmament delegations, including states not parties, and conducted extensive bilateral outreach.

This year, Australia organised a panel discussion during the First Committee plenary to mark the 10th Anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention. This was the first time a non-UN convention was given such profile during the First Committee and was a valuable opportunity to promote the Convention to states parties and non states parties alike.

During its presidency, Australia has twice authored and promoted the First Committee resolution on the Convention, which continues to attract an overwhelming positive vote, including by some states not parties. There were no votes against this resolution in the last two years and two states have changed their vote to support the resolution.

We promoted universalisation of the Convention in our region, including by holding with Vanuatu a workshop for Pacific countries in May 2007. Together with Indonesia and Canada, we will shortly hold a workshop on the Convention for South-East Asian countries in Bali.

Australia has placed special emphasis on encouraging accession by the remaining signatory states, including through a visit to Poland by the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action.

I am delighted that since the last MSP, four new states have joined the Convention. I warmly welcome Montenegro, Indonesia, Iraq and Kuwait to this MSP.

I am especially pleased by the accessions in South-East Asia and the Middle East – regions which remain under-represented in the Convention.

Along with universalisation efforts, we have promoted adherence to the Convention, both by states parties and states not parties.

I wrote to Pakistan on behalf of the meeting of states parties, urging a reconsideration of its decision to mine certain border areas. I note that Pakistan reported to the recent Meeting of High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons that it had not laid any mines between August 2006 and August 2007.

In undertaking our work on universalisation and implementation, Australia greatly appreciated the expert advice and practical assistance of a raft of organisations, but particularly the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Implementation of the Convention

Distinguished delegates

This year has seen important advances in implementing the Conventions.

We have worked together to continue the destruction of stockpiles of anti-personnel mines.

Angola, Cyprus, Serbia and Afghanistan have now fulfilled their Article 4 obligation to destroy all known stockpiles. This is a remarkable accomplishment, especially as some of these states are still facing difficult domestic circumstances.

Over 40 million landmines have been destroyed since the adoption of the Convention.

States parties, international organisation and civil society have continued to work together to assist the many victims of landmines and further the promises set out in the Convention and the Nairobi Action Plan.

This year, parallel programs for victim assistance specialists were held at both the MSP and inter-sessional meetings. And a number of successful workshops took place on victim assistance, including in Uganda, Afghanistan, Sudan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ethiopia.

Mine clearance under Article 5

Together, we are also facing the great challenge of implementing Article 5 mine clearance obligations. Even states with the greatest clearance demands are making headway.

Afghanistan has reported clearance of 60 per cent of contaminated land and Albania 85 per cent of contaminated land. Yemen, Algeria, Chad, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia and Sudan have also reported important advances.

But, despite best efforts, a number of states parties will be unable to meet their upcoming clearance obligations and will need to request extensions.

I am pleased that under Australia's presidency we agreed on a process for the preparation, submission and consideration of extension requests. We have since also established timelines, templates and assistance frameworks.

In agreeing such an efficient and flexible process, states parties are now better placed to ensure affected states will meet their clearance objectives in any extension period.

10th Anniversary and way ahead

Distinguished delegates

As you will know, this year marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption and opening for signature of the Convention.

I have attended a number of useful events to mark this anniversary, including a symposium on victim assistance in Vienna in May and a celebration in Oslo in September. Canada will also host an anniversary event in December.

The 10th anniversary is a time to reflect on the Conventions' many successes. But it also provides an opportunity to look at upcoming challenges and the way ahead.

The Convention has been remarkably successful in creating behavioural norms concerning anti-personnel mines. And it has forever stigmatised this heinous weapon.

But our ultimate goal must be the creation of universal legal norms. As such, we must continue our work towards global adherence to the Convention.

We must also continue to assist states parties to meet their obligations under the Convention, especially in relation to clearance, stockpile destruction and victim assistance.

We must ensure that the process for Article 5 extension requests is operationalised and that states are given all necessary assistance.

Only in maintaining our vigilance of these remaining challenges will we ensure the full realisation of the Convention's great humanitarian and disarmament goals.

Given the way still ahead, I am particularly pleased to hand over the presidency to Jordan and His Royal Highness Prince Mired.

Much of the credit for Jordan's remarkable progress on mine action belongs to him.

I am confident that with this experience, His Royal Highness will help guide our Convention towards realising its goals.

I would like to thank the Coordinating Committee for its excellent work over the past year.

I would also like to thank Mr Kerry Brinkert and the staff at the Implementation Support Unit who have provided invaluable support and advice during Australia's presidency.

And finally, let me thank all states parties, international organisations and civil society who have continued this year to dedicate themselves to advancing the aims of the Convention.