

OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation, 8 September 2010

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to open the Irish Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Cooperation.

Before I discuss our hopes and plans for the next four months, I would like to warmly congratulate Hungary, which so ably guided the Forum through the last number of busy months.

On behalf of all delegations, I wish to say a special thanks to the Greek delegation for their positive contribution to the Forum over the last year. Although they now leave the FSC Troika, we will fortunately still be able to call on their knowledge and experience, as they will be chairing the element of the Review Conference dealing with political-military issues.

I also welcome Iceland to the FSC Troika. We very much look forward to working with you in the Troika.

Last but not least, I would like to pay particular tribute to the Kazakh delegation for their excellent Chairmanship of the OSCE this year, and underline our readiness to work closely with you in the next few months to ensure the success of the OSCE Summit in Astana.

Mr. Chairperson,

Normally, the primary aim of the FSC Chair in the third trimester is to prepare the FSC's input into the Ministerial Council. This year, as we all know, things will be a little different.

This year, after an interval of eleven years, our leaders will meet at the OSCE Summit in Astana. Coming at the same time as the 35th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, this Summit represents an important opportunity for the OSCE.

All of us in the OSCE face multiple and multifaceted challenges, from terrorism and trafficking to climate change, from dealing with remnants of war to stockpile management, and from the proliferation of small and light weapons to the abuse of human rights.

We will only address these challenges if we work together, in cooperation and across all dimensions.

Given the significance of the Summit, Ireland's FSC Chair will devote considerable attention to the input by the FSC to the Summit and the Review Conference which precedes it.

The Summit provides the OSCE with an opportunity to reaffirm the value of, and to give renewed impetus to, the work of the FSC. In this context we will continue, as Chair, to press for progress across the range of FSC activities. In particular, we will work to achieve the maximum progress possible on the updating and modernisation of the Vienna Document. This document, which was last revised in 1999, contains key confidence and security building measures. Although few of our citizens have heard of the Vienna Document, it makes a vital contribution to their everyday security.

The improved mood on arms control generally, as marked by the signature of the new START Treaty, and the current effort to end the stalemate on the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, provides an ideal opening for progress on the Vienna Document.

There is also much work to continue on a range of other important dossiers, including the Small Arms and Light Weapons Action Plan, the Code of Conduct and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition. Additionally, the work of the FSC during 2010 has been guided by the ongoing Corfu Process.

The Corfu Process has been grounded in the principles of equality partnership, cooperation, inclusiveness and transparency and it is critical that it continues to be so. Under the Irish Chair, we intend that the Forum will continue to contribute to the Corfu Process as it did under the outgoing Hungarian FSC Chair and previous Chairs.

Mr Chairperson,

The issues of disarmament and the protection of civilians caught up in armed conflict have always been core priorities in Irish foreign policy. Our commitment to international humanitarian law is fundamental and a central precept in our approach.

As you are all well aware, the right to use force is not unlimited. In addition to establishing general rules for behaviour during warfare, international law must also seek to address the impact of particular weapons that can be excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects. Ireland has been a strong supporter of instruments such as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention, that seek to address the harm done by weapon systems such as landmines and air delivered incendiary weapons. Such weapons have in our view caused unacceptable levels of humanitarian harm.

I understand that you will receive a presentation later from Moldova on how the Moldovan military has destroyed the last of its cluster munition stockpiles. Cluster munitions have long been a further weapon system of major concern to us. The Irish Defence Forces have been dealing with the legacies of their use since the late 1970s while on peace support duties in theatres as diverse as Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo and Eritrea. From these experiences and from similar reports by Irish NGOs working in the humanitarian field in various parts of the world, it became clear to my Government that cluster munitions, although less pernicious in design than landmines, presented a similar threat to civilian lives and to economic and social development due to their high failure rates, sensitive fusing and poor discrimination at time of use. Against this background, we included in our Programme for Government a commitment to campaign for a complete ban on the use of cluster munitions. We were clear that the time had come to translate our concern into concrete action.

On a political level, from the beginning of the last decade Ireland had consistently advocated action at international level to address the problems presented by cluster munitions, particularly within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). However, we failed to secure support from major suppliers and possessors of these weapons, who insisted that existing international law was adequate to deal with the issue. A sea change occurred with the transformation in public and political perception of cluster munitions by their widespread use during Israeli operations in South Lebanon in the summer

of 2006. The enormous humanitarian hardship arising from that conflict persuaded many previously sceptical States that urgent international action on cluster munitions was required.

The conflict reinforced the view of my Government, and confirmed for many others, that these weapons were inherently unsafe and caused unacceptable harm to civilians.

The Lebanon conflict occurred just a few months before the 3rd Review Conference of the CCW Convention in November 2006. Ireland was among the many States who were extremely disappointed that the Review Conference was unable to agree an appropriate mandate to address the cluster munitions issue. At the conclusion of that conference our delegation reiterated Ireland's determination to continue working to achieve progress on the issue, whether within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons or elsewhere.

My Government was happy to accept the invitation of the Government of Norway to attend a meeting in Oslo in February 2007 where 46 States declared their commitment to conclude by 2008 an international legally-binding instrument to prohibit cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

Ireland subsequently played a leading role as a member of the Core Group that guided the Oslo Process. We were honoured to host and chair the Dublin Diplomatic Conference in May 2008 which negotiated and adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). I would like here to pay tribute to the bold initiative of Norway on this issue and to our other partners in the process leading up to the achievement of the Convention, namely, Austria, the Holy See, Mexico, New Zealand and Peru. The contribution made by civil society and the Cluster Munitions Coalition was also crucial. We are happy that the partnership with the Coalition and with a larger number of likeminded States has worked successfully over the period since adoption of the Convention so as to make its provisions a reality.

The Convention entered into force on 1 August this year. This was a moment of great pride for me and my Government. Thirty-nine States have now ratified it and 108 have signed it. Our next milestone will be the First Meeting of States Parties in November in Lao PDR, a country which has been more affected by cluster munitions than any other country in the world and Ireland is looking forward to this important event.

We are a member of the Lao Support Group, an informal network which brings together States, international organisations and NGOs to support preparations for the meeting, and we have also provided financial support and an Irish national aid worker to assist the Government in Vientiane. We envisage that this first meeting will agree an Action Plan to ensure effective and timely implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and concrete and measurable steps, actions and targets to be completed within specific time periods. I strongly believe that we must send a clear signal to the international community that implementation of the Convention will be pursued with the same energy and vigour that characterised its negotiation.

Mr Chairperson,

At the heart of the Convention on Cluster Munitions is an immediate and unconditional ban on all cluster munitions which cause unacceptable harm to civilians. Each State Party undertakes never in any circumstances to use, develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer cluster munitions, or to assist another party in doing so. Crucially, the Convention does not provide for any exceptions and it was also a very important achievement that there is no transition period during which the weapons outlawed could still be used.

The Convention sets new standards for assistance to victims and for clearing affected areas. I am also particularly pleased that we have succeeded in stigmatising any future use of cluster munitions.

We believe that the Convention deals in a definitive manner with the humanitarian threat presented by cluster munitions, by prohibiting all those sub-munition-based systems that have caused humanitarian harm. It sets a high but attainable standard for States. We recognise that many who possess such weapons have made considerable sacrifices in order to comply with this standard in terms of investment, logistics and military capability. We also recognise that for similar reasons other States who rely heavily on these weapons and who may have special security challenges may not be able to adhere to the high Convention standard at this stage. To that end, my Government continues to engage with major producers and possessors of these weapons within the CCW framework, responding to the same humanitarian concerns that gave rise to the Convention, by seeking to agree meaningful prohibitions and restrictions

on design and use of cluster weapons which continue to be retained by States. During the negotiations on the Convention we also recognised the continuing need for military interoperability between States Parties and those who are not party. These realities are reflected in Article 21 of the Convention.

In our view, it strikes an appropriate balance between the security concerns of States engaged in multinational operations and the continuing need to discourage use of these weapons and to persuade non-parties to seek alternatives to cluster munitions both during military operations and in terms of long term procurement planning.

Mr Chairperson,

Notwithstanding the considerable security challenges still facing many OSCE States, it is most encouraging that to date 34 out of the 56 OSCE participating States have signed the Convention and that 18 of them have already ratified it. We urge those States who have not to date been able to adhere to the Convention to re-assess their need to retain cluster munitions, and, as a first step, to eliminate completely from their stockpiles weapons that disperse sub-munitions without any safe-guarding mechanisms or features.

Mr. Chairperson,

I am pleased to take this opportunity to announce funding by Ireland for a number of specific FSC projects, including over €9,000 for the project in Moldova relating to the destruction of air bombs and €10,000 for the Ukrainian project to rehabilitate certain areas affected by Explosive Remnants of War.

I am also pleased to announce that we are making a funding contribution of €75,000 to the OSCE Police Advisory Group in Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Chairperson,

Before concluding, I would like to look ahead briefly to Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2012.

For Ireland, the OSCE is of critical importance for the achievement of peace, security and prosperity across the region covered by its fifty-six participating States. As an international organisation, the OSCE is unique, both in terms of its composition and geographical spread; one of its major strengths is that it brings together countries from Europe, Central Asia and America and helps to fashion a common vision of how global and regional challenges can be addressed together. I believe that the organisation has a vital role to play in enhancing peace, security and democratic values in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space.

The OSCE plays an important role in conflict prevention and resolution, particularly in relation to the protracted conflicts in the region. As Chair, we will work hard to contribute to the resolution of these conflicts, drawing on our experience in this area in the context of the Northern Ireland peace process.

With great pride and commitment, we are looking forward to the challenges and opportunities of chairing the OSCE in 2012.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

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