European Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva Reaffirms Support for the Mine Ban Treaty and Convention on Cluster Munitions

Mined Lives photo exhibition opens in Brussels

Firoz Ali Alizada, ICBL Treaty Implementation Officer; Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response; Gervasio Sánchez, photographer; Sylvie Brigot, ICBL Executive Director; and Thomas Nash, CMC Coordinator, at the opening of the photo exhibition Mined Lives: Ten Years.

On 30 September 2010, representatives of the ICBL and Cluster Munition Coalition briefed senior officials from the European Union at a seminar organized by the European Commission's Directorate-General on External Relations. They presented a state of play as well as the next steps for ridding the world of these weapons, and addressing consequences of past use, and they called on continued support from European Union members. The European Commission is the world's largest institutional donor for mine action.*

The Belgian Presidency recalled that the credibility and efficiency of the European Union Human Security Policy would gain a lot from the adherence of all European Union members to all disarmament and humanitarian international treaties. Finland and Poland have committed to joining have joined the Mine Ban Treaty by 2012.

"The mine problem can be solved in our lifetime in the majority of the affected countries if there is the political will to do so. But there is still a lot to be done before we can cross the landmine issue off the world's to-do list!" said ICBL Executive Director Sylvie Brigot, addressing the seminar participants. "Costs of mine clearance and victim assistance will place a strong demand on states for sustained or increased funding for at least the next five years. But donor states who face budget difficulties should not give up: they should think more creatively, strategically and in a coordinated manner about how to get the job done." (Click here for the full speaking notes.)

ICBL Treaty Implementation Officer Firoz Ali Alizada presented his own experience as a landmine survivor, and recalled: "Over the past ten years, mine survivors, their families and communities, did not receive the services they needed. The vast majority of the survivors remained in isolation and poverty." (See full speech below.)

Cluster Munition Coalition Coordinator Thomas Nash called on the members of the European Union not yet on board the Convention on Cluster Munitions to join at the earliest opportunity, and called for high-level participation in the upcoming First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, to be held in Vientiane, Laos, from 9-12 November 2010.

Handicap International Belgium Research Coordinator Katleen Maes presented the latest research data on assistance to mine and cluster munition survivors.

The seminar also brought together the Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service, the president of the Swiss NGO Geneva Call and other experts including from the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining. Topics covered throughout the day included advocacy on the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Mine Ban Treaty, victim assistance, developments in mine action, engaging non-state armed groups and linking mine action with development.

Echoing the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights' call from last July, European Parliament member Ulrike Lunacek called on all European Union member states to join the Convention on Cluster Munition, to stop the production of cluster munitions and to contribute to the empowerment of survivors of these weapons.

The day concluded with the launch of the exhibition "Mined Lives: Ten Years" by Gervasio Sánchez, photographer, war correspondent and UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace. European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva, took the floor to reiterate her commitment to address the suffering caused by these weapons. "Mined Lives: Ten Years" will be displayed at the Commission's headquarters until 15 October 2010 (Berlaymont Building, Hall 1).
* The United States being the largest individual donor.

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Speech delivered by Firoz Ali Alizada, ICBL Treaty Implementation Officer

30 September 2010

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Cluster Munition Coalition and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and to share my personal experiences as a landmine survivor about the damaging impact of landmines and cluster munitions and the positive impact of the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Let me begin by sharing my story as a landmine victim. My life and livelihood were destroyed by a landmine when I was just 13 years old, in 1996. The landmine not only took my legs away but also injured my left hand. Not only did the landmine physically disable me, but it also destroyed my family's livelihood. My dad had to spend all of his savings on medical care, after he had already experienced a tragedy when losing his elder son during the civil war. The landmine isolated me from my friends, the friends that I spent 13 years of my childhood with. The landmine tragedy forced me to quit my birthplace because it was neither physically accessible nor socially possible to work or go to school for a double amputee anymore. And I and my family had to cope with tremendous amount of psychological pressure for several years after the accident, until I found my way to accept my disability and move forward. I have to thank the Mine Ban Treaty for the opportunity it offered me to overcome lots of challenges and enjoy a life with honor and dignity.

I wish the Mine Ban Treaty was adopted before I'd lost my legs. Because this treaty has been saving the lives of innocent people who have been threatened by landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war, like me. Two months ago I went to my village in Afghanistan, where I stepped on a landmine 14 years ago. I saw deminers were cleaning the area, I was so happy to see my villagers will no longer be threatened by those inhuman weapons. Again thanks to the Mine Ban Treaty!

I won't go into details about the achievements of the Mine Ban Treaty and the new Convention on Cluster Munitions, as I am sure the next speakers will talk about them. In brief, I truly believe in the vital impact of these two conventions. I strongly believe in the significance of our tireless efforts towards universalization and implementation of these conventions. For instance: 16 countries wouldn't be free of landmines without our commitment and support, over 45 millions of stockpiled landmines wouldn't be destroyed without our dedication, over 1300km2 of contaminated land would not be cleared without our hard work. These indicators clearly demonstrate that what we, the civil society, governments and donor organizations including the European Union are doing is genuinely worth it.

It is essential that we all note that further successes towards a world free of cluster munitions and landmines, as well as full protection and promotion of rights of landmine and cluster munitions victims need further support, strong and long-term commitment and more resources by States Parties and donor organizations in particular the European Union.

Our 10 year of experience in universalizing and implementing the Mine Ban Treaty demonstrate that a long-haul commitment is essential to achieving the time-bound obligations of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Given the very good reputation and wide representation of the EU throughout the world, there are a lot of expectations from EU to stay committed by increasing its support for affected countries to implement their obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, by supporting initiatives taken by civil society organizations fighting against cluster munitions and landmines, and by increased support to victim assistance.

Over the past ten years, mine survivors, their families and communities, did not receive the services they needed. The vast majority of the survivors remained in isolation and poverty. There has not been a balance in mine action funding. For example: Afghanistan has been at the top of the world's aid agenda for the past decade. An average of 80 to 100 million USD of the world's mine action funding went to Afghanistan each year for several years, but the situation of the victims didn't change. We hope the EU and EC as well as other donors appropriately consider
victim assistance when funding mine action programs as well as other development and poverty reduction projects in countries affected by landmines and cluster munitions.

In conclusion I would like to draw your attention on a number of key issues with regard to the 1st Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (1MSP) that will take place in Vientiane in about six weeks from now. We urge all states to participate in the 1MSP at the highest possible level. We call on states that have not yet joined the Convention on Cluster Munition to get on board before the 1MSP or as soon as possible. We hope it would be the case for at least 15 European countries that have not yet joined the convention. We expect that states will come to the 1MSP prepared to give an update on progress made in implementing the Convention. We hope States Parties will adopt an action plan with the concrete, measurable and time-bound actions to translate the convention's legal obligations into concrete results for affected communities as soon as possible.

The Cartagena Action Plan that was adopted last year at the Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty and the Vientiane Action Plan that will be adopted at the First Meeting of the States Parties, provide a clear road map for States Parties to implement their obligations under the two conventions. There is a crucial need for the EU and EU member states to enhance their efforts in implementing these action plans in a comprehensive, effective and efficient manner.

As a landmine survivor and as a campaigner against landmines and cluster munitions, I deeply appreciate EU and EC's vital roles in all areas of mine action including victim assistance. With no doubt, without support from the EU and EC, we wouldn't have achieved what we have achieved over the past decade. Please keep up your support, because it does make a difference on the ground!

Thank you.