



**Oslo, Norway, 3 December 2008 –
Secretary-General's message to signing conference of the
Convention on Cluster Munitions**

[delivered by Sergio Duarte, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs]

This signing conference marks a major step forward in global efforts to protect civilians and control the noxious spread of deadly, inhumane weapons.

The horrific humanitarian impact of cluster munitions is well known. During and long after conflict, they have maimed and killed scores of refugees, nurses, journalists, passers-by, women and men working in fields and orchards, and children helping with household chores or at play.

Exactly 11 years ago today, governments, international organizations, parliamentarians and civil society gathered for the historic signing of the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention. That treaty added a new chapter to international humanitarian law, disarmament and non-proliferation, and is a prime example of how a shared sense of conviction and determination can translate into concrete measures that save lives and livelihoods.

In much the same way, the efforts of a broad-based coalition of States, international organizations and civil society has brought about this new Convention on Cluster Munitions, which further strengthens international humanitarian law. Not only will the convention prohibit the future use and proliferation of cluster weapons, it will also promote their very obsolescence. Moreover, the Convention's far-reaching provisions on victim assistance and clearance will improve the lives of survivors, families and communities that have been affected by cluster munitions.

The conclusion of this Convention indicates a significant and fundamental change in the position of many governments that, until recently, regarded cluster munitions as essential to their security policies and military doctrines. The importance of this shift cannot be overemphasized. A great number of governments present here today, some with considerable defense and peacekeeping responsibilities, have concluded that their policies were not in full concurrence with their international obligations and could jeopardize recovery and development efforts. They decided not only to embrace the responsibility for clearance and victim assistance, but also to revise their military doctrines, to do away with their stockpiles, and to terminate the production and trade in these weapons. These are impressive policy decisions which I applaud without reservation.

Indeed, today's signing conference also offers hope that States can depart from other long-held positions in the light of new evidence and new understandings of their own interests. Many areas -- from disarmament and development to human rights, energy, climate change and the environment -- are ripe for precisely this kind of change. I urge States to show the same flexibility and sense of responsibility in these arenas that they have shown in agreeing on the Cluster Weapons Convention.

I would like to express great appreciation for the vision and leadership that Norway has displayed in moving this process forward. The core group of governments, which so

ably organized the open and transparent “Oslo process”, was instrumental. The Cluster Munition Coalition and the International Committee of the Red Cross mobilized public support and political will. Together, they brought to life the words of the renowned Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen: “A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm”.

The large number of participants here today attests to the broad support enjoyed by the Convention. I am honoured to assume the duties of depositary, and encourage all governments to sign and ratify the Convention without delay.

Sadly, there remains much work to do in mitigating the dreadful humanitarian suffering caused by cluster weapons and the United Nations is firmly committed to continuing those efforts.

Congratulations again to all who have made this day possible.

For more information please contact Janet Pontin at the UN Public Information Office
Tel 267777 ext: 715, janet.pontin@undp.org
or Viengsompasong Inthavong in the Office of the Resident Coordinator
Tel 267777 ext: 753, viengsompasong.inthavong@undp.org

Notes for editors:

The United Nations Country Team in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is committed to supporting the efforts of the Government to improve the life of all citizens, especially those most vulnerable. We shall continue to work closely with the Government and all development partners for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Our collective endeavour is to assist the people of Lao PDR to achieve progress and better standards of living for all.