

**CLOSING REMARKS TO THE
LIMA, PERU CONFERENCE ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS
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by Jody Williams, Nobel Women's Initiative

In my closing comments I must take a moment to note that it was reported today that the Burmese military dictatorship has extended the imprisonment of our sister Nobel Peace Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, which was to have ended in two days, on 27 May. As many of you know, she is known as the “Mandela of Asia” – Aung San Suu Kyi has spent most of these past 17 years imprisoned for her non-violent struggle to bring democracy to her people. On her behalf, I would ask every government representative here – in particular any that might have particular influence with Burma – to make every effort to secure her release. Thank you.

Regarding this conference, like all of us in Lima, I have listened with interest to the discussions here. This important conference has indeed moved us forward toward fulfilling the promise of the Oslo Declaration. We believe that there will be a comprehensive, integrated treaty to eliminate cluster bombs in 2008.

Like my colleague Earl from Canada, I have some random observations as a result of the discussions. As with Earl, the comment on guns and “realism” resonated with me. Small arms and light weapons, I would agree, are a hideous problem that we were told here *realistically* could not be dealt with. I would contend that *realistically* they most definitely can be dealt with.

As a matter of fact, right now there is a UN process underway to result in an Arms Trade Treaty. As we just heard now, Earl invited everyone here to a conference in Canada at the end of August to discuss controlling the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We can deal with this problem which has put weapons like the Kalishnekov into the hands of children as young as eight, making it that much easier to use them as child soldiers.

I believe that sometimes “realism” is simply a synonym for “we don't *want* to deal with X problem” – not that the problem *can't* be dealt with.

Thinking back to the earliest days of organizing the International Campaign to Ban Landmines – to my first trips to New York City to meet with government missions there about banning landmines. The “realists” there – every single country I met with, with the exception of Mexico – said it could not be done. They said it was a “utopian dream.” They said that landmines were indispensable weapons, and when used responsibly were not a problem.

Well, the ICBL grew – as did our protest over landmines and their utility. Some might have said back then “Methinks those NGOs doth protest too much.” While I recognize the double entendre of that famous Shakespearian line, I prefer to use it

literally and note that by “protesting too much” we pushed governments to give the world a comprehensive, integrated Mine Ban Treaty with deadlines and clear obligations to deal with the problem, and that in the ten years of its life, the MBT has made a huge difference. I would say we protested as much as was needed to achieve our goals of a treaty banning antipersonnel landmines, increased resources for mine clearance and increased resources for victim assistance.

And we are pleased to see that the MBT is serving as a model for a comprehensive, integrated cluster munition treaty – one with deadlines for stockpile destruction and clearance; one with stronger provisions for victim assistance. We have learned a lot in the years since the negotiation of the MBT and know that some provisions of a cluster convention must be stronger than similar provisions in the MBT. We are confident that a clear, strong treaty will be achieved through the Oslo Process.

I also recall in my early days of promoting the ICBL going to a party where a US colonel asked what I did. And contrary to what many of you who know my somewhat combative nature might think, I did not want to get into a discussion on the merits of banning landmines so I almost did not answer. But when I did tell him about the ICBL, he exclaimed that we should not stop with landmines, we needed to ban cluster bombs as well. Frankly, I was shocked.

And in many ways I am kind of “shocked” now because I never expected that not so long after banning antipersonnel landmines, we would now be here in Lima as part of the effort to eliminate cluster munitions. In fact, as I think about it, Norway announced its intention to launch this process in November of 2006 – just a little over ten years after the Canadian announcement in October of 1996 of the stand alone “Ottawa Process” that gave us the MBT. And now the Oslo Process has us on the road to a comprehensive treaty to eliminate cluster munitions – weapons that military themselves have labeled “losers” and “relics of the Cold War.” Weapons that some US military refused to use in the invasion of Iraq. They knew the cluster bombs that their artillery would shower on densely populated areas would not only be a humanitarian disaster, but would also limit the mobility of their own troops who would have to try to move through the volatile and dangerous cluster duds left behind after the attacks.

We keep hearing that the burden of proof in demonstrating the military utility of cluster weapons – in real combat situations and NOT in “controlled testing” – vs. the humanitarian impact rests with the military. If that is the case, I would hope that such demonstrations would be made by soldiers with a conscience – like those I just mentioned. Honest assessments of the use of cluster munitions in real combat situation, we believe can only lead to the elimination of cluster munitions. It is entirely unclear if an assessment made by “realists” would be *real* and that they would recognize that it is their responsibility to protect civilians from such pernicious weapons of ill repute and not their responsibility to protect their weapons of ill repute at the cost of the lives and limbs of innocent civilians – and at the expense of international humanitarian law.

I believe it is time that we stop thinking about “national security” as the framework that will bring us security. Do we really need more weapons in an already overweaponized world? We need to think in terms of human security in this very globalized world. We need to eliminate cluster munitions. We need to face the huge problem of the possibility of a new nuclear arms race, lead by my country. We need to protest and if governments and militaries don’t want to hear us, we need to “protest too much” so that they have no choice.

I believe that we “utopian dreamers” will prevail on clusters, as we have on landmines. NGOs protested and governments responded. They are responding again – this time in “preventative diplomacy” to deal with cluster munitions before they become the global contaminant that landmines became. We’ve worried about the approximately 200 million landmines in stockpiles around the world – we’d better worry more about the cluster bombs in stockpiles around the world. The US alone has about four times the number of submunitions in its stocks than the total global stockpile of landmines. And the US is just one out of dozens of countries that stockpile cluster munitions.

The time for prevention is now. The means of that prevention is the Oslo Process. Thank you Norway for launching the process. Thank you Peru for following so quickly with this important conference. We believe that very strong strides have been made here and we also thank Peru for its decision to seek a continent-wide “cluster munition free zone.” We believe that Lima has moved us firmly along in the process and progress will continue to be made in Costa Rica and perhaps also in Serbia.

We also congratulate the African states on today’s anniversary of the African Union. We recognize that you have come very far to participate in this conference. We appreciate the support of the fifteen African states represented here in moving this initiative forward and in their willingness to seek an African-wide “cluster munition free zone” as well.

We NGOs will do all that we can to support those initiatives as well as carry out our own. I am pleased to note that the ICBL has confirmed a cluster conference with the Arab League, to be held in Cairo in October of this year. Just as in the Ottawa Process, we will be tireless in working to build support at the national, regional and international levels as we move forward in the Oslo Process. Together we will insure that the momentum built here in Lima will continue to build through the Vienna Conference, the Wellington Conference and finally at the Dublin Conference that will result in 2008 in a comprehensive, integrated convention eliminating cluster munitions.

THANK YOU.

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