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Signing the Cluster Munitions Treaty-Oslo December 2008

In Oslo, Norway, on Wednesday 3 December 2008, Australia and 93 other countries signed the Cluster Munitions Treaty. These governments from around the world have signed the most significant disarmament and humanitarian treaty of the decade, banning the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of most types of cluster munitions, and obligating them to provide victim assistance and to clear contaminated land. Signatories of the Convention on Cluster Munitions include many of the world's producers, stockpilers and past users, as well as some of the most seriously affected countries.

Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, South Africa and the UK are already destroying their stockpiles of cluster munitions. Spain said it would destroy its stockpiles within the next seven months.

Some 50 foreign, defence and government ministers from around the world signed the Treaty, demonstrating the high level of political commitment to urgently rid the world of cluster munitions. As ICBL explains "The Mine Ban Treaty and Convention on Cluster Munitions were both inspired by the need to put people's lives before any dubious political or military considerations. Together, the two conventions will create an even stronger framework to protect civilians from further suffering and to address the effects of past use of indiscriminate weapons such as antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions."

The signing was witnessed by a large contingent of civil society representatives from all over the world including survivors from cluster munitions, their families and members of affected communities together with representatives of countries that did not sign the treaty. The signing ceremony took place in the Oslo City Hall, the venue for the Nobel Prize announcements and symbolically took place on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

As Hon Mr Stephen Smith MP Minister of Foreign Affairs said,

"Rarely has the international community acted with such determined common purpose as in the negotiation of this Convention. I congratulate Norway for its untiring commitment in bringing about this new Treaty. I congratulate Ireland for its outstanding Chairmanship of the Diplomatic Conference in May at which the text of this convention was agreed. I acknowledge the determined leadership of all members of the core group, as well as all states that contributed their ideas and energy to the negotiations.

As States we also owe civil society a great deal of credit for this outcome. Civil society, in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross and key members of the Cluster Munitions Coalition, kept the issue before the public and before governments and contributed impressive expertise to the deliberations. I pay particular tribute to the inspiring role of the survivors. I urge all here today to turn our determined common purpose to promote the Convention's rapid entry into force, its full implementation and its universal membership.

Australia will contribute strongly to such efforts. I am proud Australia is one of the original signatories to this vitally important humanitarian treaty and am personally honoured to represent Australia at this historic signing"