Africa Regional Conference on the Universalisation and Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions

From 25 – 26 March 2010, South Africa’s Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) hosted the Africa Regional Conference on the Universalisation and Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions at the Premier Hotel in Pretoria, South Africa. The Arms Management Programme of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and the Regional Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided logistical support for the Conference and acted as the Secretariat. The Conference was made possible with the generous financial support of the Royal Norwegian Government. These finances were administered by ISS.

The purpose, aims and objectives of the Africa Regional Conference on the Universalisation and Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions were to:

a. Inform states in the region about the Convention on Cluster Munitions, particularly those who have not signed the Convention;
b. Maintain the political momentum and international visibility of the Convention on Cluster Munitions between the Oslo Signing Conference (December 2008) and the 1st Meeting of States Parties to be held in Laos PDR, from 8-12 November 2010;
c. Enhance understanding on the provisions of the Convention and the national steps needed for ratification and implementation;
d. Promote universalisation of the Convention.

All African countries or territories were each invited by South Africa to delegate two experts responsible for implementing the Convention in their respective countries or territories to participate in the Conference. The following attended: Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Republic of), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Egypt (Observer), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition, representatives of the following attended: Embassy of the Republic of Austria, Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium, Embassy of Chad, Ireland Embassy, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain and the USA Embassy. African representatives of the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) were also invited to participate - the CMC is an international coalition of around 350 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in 85 countries to encourage urgent action against cluster munitions.

Expert and resource organisations invited included:

i. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
ii. Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA)
iii. Handicap International – Belgium
iv. Uganda Landmine Survivors Association
v. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
vi. United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
vii. Geneva Centre for International Humanitarian Demining (GCIHD).
The Opening panel sessions included the participation of:

i. Ambassador Abdul Samad Minty, DDG, Ambassador and Special Representative for Disarmament and NEPAD, Department of International Relations and Co-operation, South Africa

ii. Mr Berihu Mesele, Cluster Munition Survivor from Ethiopia

iii. Ms. Annick Bouvier, Deputy Head of Delegation, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

iv. Ms. Almaz Gebru, Senior Advisor, United Nations Development Programme, Regional Centre

v. Mr. Kennedy Mabasa, Ceasefire Campaign, the South African representative of the Cluster Munition Coalition.

The Closing panel sessions included the participation of:

i. Ms. Gry Larsen, State Secretary/Deputy Minister, Royal Norwegian Government

ii. Mr Rob Wensley, Deputy Director: Conventional Arms, Department of International Relations and Co-operation, South Africa.

The Programme consisted of the following sessions and topics:

i. Understanding the Convention on Cluster Munitions

ii. Key Provisions and Obligations of the Convention on Cluster Munitions

iii. The CCM and its relationship to other instruments of International Humanitarian Law

iv. The Africa Regional Conferences on Cluster Munitions and the Importance of the Convention in Africa

v. Status of the Convention in Africa

vi. The Importance of Universalisation

vii. National Implementation, Co-operation and Assistance

viii. Promoting a Common Understanding of the Provisions of the Convention in Africa

ix. Stockpile Destruction: Technical Solutions

x. Survivor Assistance in Africa

xi. Partnerships for Compliance between States, International Organisations and Civil Society

xii. United Nations Support to National Implementation and Capacity Development

xiii. Operational Challenges and Responses in Implementing the CCM

xiv. National Legislation, Transparency Measures and Reporting

Importantly a Session was devoted to the forthcoming global meeting in advance of the entry into force of the Convention to be hosted by the Government of Chile in June 2010 as well as the First Meeting of State Parties in November 2010. This session was privileged to have Mr. Saleumxay Kommasith, Director General, Department of International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lao PDR as Chair.
During the discussions, several African state representatives indicated that there was progress in either signing or ratifying the Convention in their countries and many hoped to be in Laos PDR as full States Parties.

The Norwegian government came in for special praise for taking the lead in both raising awareness of the humanitarian disaster caused by the use of the weapon and for developing an intense process of consultations, which eventually led to the Convention as well as for its continued work at the national level in many countries of the world.