

Your Excellencies, honourable ladies and gentlemen, dear colleague activists,

First of all, I would like to greet all of you and to express my great pleasure to be invited to speak at this conference. It is my great honour to have an opportunity to explain the dangers posed by one of today's most monstrous weapons.

I worked in the Yugoslav Army as a deminer. My expertise are NATO cluster bombs. Since 1999 I had worked at many locations contaminated by cluster bombs.

On several occasions I went to Dubinje Airport in Sjenica to demine unexploded cluster bombs dropped during the 1999 Nato bombing campaign. At that time local people who lived in the nearby, and had farmland and houses near the airport, came to ask me to destroy unexploded cluster bombs that were lying in their fields. I responded to all their requests because I saw their children playing there.

In order to have you understand my position, first I have to explain that under our law the army only could clear unexploded objects inside military facilities. Civilian structures were responsible for clearing cluster bombs in civilian objects. For a civilian organization the clearing procedure is very long and plenty of time could pass until they arrived at the site. I was there and under no circumstances I could have allowed someone getting hurt, especially not children, because I think I wouldn't have been able to live with it. Cluster munitions do not differentiate their victims on any basis and anyone facing them will suffer consequences. I was struggling to save as many civilians as possible from getting hurt or killed disregarding their nationality, religion or age and I took risks.

I was injured on November 9, 2000 at the Dubinje Airport in Sjenica while destroying BLU 97 cluster munition made in the USA. I lost both hands and legs, my hearing and my sight was severely injured, and I suffered severe burns, head and lungs trauma in the explosion. Just after the explosion I was still conscious and I managed to call soldiers to help me and to transport me to a hospital. The ride took about 2 hours, and I lost a lot of blood. Just before entering the hospital I fell into coma that lasted for the next four days. My injuries were treated at the Military Medical Academy in Belgrade for four years and I had over 25 surgeries during that period.

The rehabilitation of this dangerous weapons victim is very long and very difficult. The survivor, his family, his relatives and the community all suffer tremendous post-traumatic consequences. The affected state itself also suffers great consequences because of the long and expensive medical treatment. It also has to provide support for the survivors and to help them. In the case of greater number of victims, it is very probable that the state wouldn't have enough funding to help victims. We are witnessing that the affected countries are economically weakened and are unable to provide help. The first priority of these affected countries is to rebuild the infrastructure and destroyed facilities. And the costs to do that are extremely high.

In such case who will be deprived of funding?

Those who need them the most: Cluster bomb victims.

I'm telling you all this because you need to understand the terrible consequences we are facing. I want your strong support, and your help to accelerate the procedure for signing the Treaty in your respective countries.

I would like to explain in a few words some technical details about cluster bombs. There are many countries which produce cluster bombs. The biggest producer in the world are the USA. They also have the largest stockpile of cluster munition.

There are many kinds of cluster munitions depending on purpose and producer. The cluster bomb consists of a frame which holds several dozens, or even several hundreds of bomblets. When a cluster bomb, the frame with cluster bomblets is dropped from the aircraft, it falls to the certain height, where it opens up and dozens or even hundreds of cluster bombs are dispersed.

Each cluster bomb, each frame with cluster bomblets, also contains a laser telemeter which is pre-set to activate when a cluster bomb reaches a certain height, the frame opens up and bomblets are released and spread while falling on the ground over a large area. Even a single frame with bomblets can contaminate the area wider than two football pitches. Usually more cluster bombs are dropped over the targeted area.

Even when the target is a military facility, in most cases large civilian areas are also affected. Consequently one can say that these weapons are extremely inaccurate. After falling onto the ground, 10-30 (ten to thirty percent) of the bomblets remain unexploded. According to the official data, over 97% of its victims are civilians, and the least harmed are those against whom the bombs were primarily targeted - armies of the opposing states. Lately, cluster bombs have been used to cause the chaos inside of the civilian population, and not for striking some military assets.

The most notorious cluster bomb is the US-made BLU 97. It contains 202 bomblets. Each bomblet contains around 280 grams of strong (vehement) explosive. This cluster bomb has a triple effect, having impact on the light-armoured vehicles because of its cumulative spray, it is effective against the living force because of its fragmented armour and the third effect is incendiary. While detonating, fragmented armour moulders fall apart into several hundreds and even thousands of pieces and has the force to penetrate the multilayered 6 mm thick steel armour from the 11 m distance.

At the end, I would like to thank you for your patience and the time you have spent listening - I hope I succeeded in explaining the consequences of this monstrous weapon. I hope we will bring about the end to this weapon and that way save thousands of innocent lives and the future of our children. I am using this opportunity to plead for your contribution and your help in accelerating the Treaty signing procedures in your countries.

Thank you,