

STATEMENT BY Mr. MAXWELL KERLEY
DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS MINE ACTION SERVICE
Cartagena, 29 November 2009

Mister Vice-President, Ambassador Eckey, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

About two centuries ago, Simon Bolivar, the great South American freedom leader and a visionary, said “Judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment”.

This quote remains unfortunately valid for a number of tragic situations, including those generated by the humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental impact caused by antipersonnel mines. Many decades of experience with these weapons proved the necessity to radically change our judgment about these cruel weapons and ban them for ever.

We are gathering today here in the historic town of Cartagena because several years ago a number of individuals had a vision of a world free of landmines and of the suffering caused by them. As most visions, this seemed originally as a pretentious and unrealistic dream. But the vision took its momentum, as individuals convinced governments to engage in multilateral efforts to address the problem. After overcoming some initial obstacles, the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty was negotiated, adopted and entered into force in 1999.

Ten years after, the Convention’s visionary norms are shared by a large number of states in the planet and by the great majority of the human population and antipersonnel mines became the pariah of all conflicts. The Convention has already accomplished its promise in many parts of the world and the vision is no longer a dream but an auspicious reality.

Let me reiterate today that the United Nations fully shares this vision, but let me tell you something else.

Some people might say that the Mine Ban Convention is not a United Nations treaty, because it was negotiated out of United Nations system. This is a fallacious argument. Year after year, and in so many ways and circumstances, the United Nations has reiterated its commitment to the Convention, its aims, its objectives and its provisions. We do it with our words, including those of the Secretary-General, as well as with our acts. We do by working together with you all, and with mine affected communities and among ourselves in making our world a safer place to live, a world free of landmines for ever, for us and for the future generations.

The Mine Ban Treaty does not belong uniquely to states parties, it belongs to Humanity. The United Nations as an indivisible entity and as whole, embraces the Convention and regards it as an integral part of its “raison d’etre”. Everyday we make our contribution to assist in its faithful implementation, and some times, we also share our part of sacrifice with the lives and limbs of our mine action, humanitarian, development and peacekeeping workers.

On behalf of my colleagues from the United Nations, from the field and from Headquarters, I wish you all—or should I say all of us—a most successful and forward-looking Cartagena Summit for a Mine-Free World.

Viva Cartagena!