

Holy See: Cluster Bomb Ban a "Big Step"

Delegation Played "Key" Role in Negotiations

GENEVA, JUNE 3, 2008 (Zenit.org).- The international agreement to ban cluster bombs is a "big step," even though there is still much work to be done, according to the Holy See's permanent observer at the U.N. offices in Geneva.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi led the Holy See delegation at last week's International Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions, in which he said the Holy See "had a key role" in the agreement.

The final treaty, signed Friday in Dublin by 111 nations, prohibits the production, use, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions. According to the agreement, cluster bombs are scheduled to disappear over the next eight years.

Archbishop Tomasi told Vatican Radio on Saturday that "the international community is quite compact on this vision to put an end to the cruelty implied in the use of this type of bombs, which fall indiscriminately on the civilian population."

According to the prelate, the most important point of the agreement is that "it bans all cluster bombs used to date in different wars and, in addition, conditions the transport, construction of new bombs and also new technologies that can be adapted to these explosives."

He explained that the role played by the Holy See was "key," and that it acted "as bridge between the various groups and institutions of states, leading to a positive conviction on the document, an instrument that would be, as [Benedict XVI] has said, strong and credible. And this is exactly what it is."

On May 18, the day before the conference began, the Pope expressed his hopes that "through the responsibility of all the participants, a strong and credible international instrument will be created."

"The path to complete this work is still long," Archbishop Tomasi added, noting the absence in the convention of countries such as the United States, Israel, Russia, China and Pakistan.

Despite this, he said the fact that cluster bombs "has been declared illegal in international law" will "carry weight in the decisions and considerations of the countries that were not present."

Peace, not force

On the most recent episode of the weekly Vatican Television program "Octave Dies," Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi said cluster bombs "should not exist."

The director of the Holy See's press office said that "those who manufacture and export [cluster munitions] fear the economic damage that their banning would cause. But isn't the harm that will be suffered by the nations against whom they will be used and the harm they cause their victims much greater?"

He continued, "How can the economic loss incurred by the prohibition of such weapons that are offensive by nature and directly intended to cause great injury to people -- most of whom are innocent civilians -- be compared to the [dangerous task of] mine clearing and removal, and above all the suffering and the injury to victims, their families and communities?"

"You cannot love with offensive weapons in your hands," Father Lombardi explained, citing Pope Paul VI. "Weapons destroy reciprocal trust, require an enormous amount of spending and impede projects of peace and solidarity."

"International life can only base itself on peace and not on force," the priest added. "Every effort against the production, sale, and use of weapons must be supported. The fight against antipersonnel mines, the fight against cluster munitions -- these too must be supported."