



**Opening Statement by Jean-Baptiste Richardier,**

**27<sup>th</sup> of November 2017, Maputo**

---

Thank you Your Excellency,

Dear participants,

First of all, on behalf of Handicap International and INEW - the International Network on Explosive Weapons - I wish to warmly thank the Government of Mozambique, hosting this conference and welcoming the 20 African States that have answered positively to the invitation. I also wish to salute the presence of numerous African civil society organisations, as well as members of INEW, ICRC and OCHA representatives.

Actually this gathering reminds us the spirit of the process that led to the Ottawa convention on antipersonnel landmines, and later to the Oslo convention on cluster munitions. Then, like-minded States and well organized CSOs have demonstrated that their alliance and concerted efforts could lead to dramatically positive changes where the CCW had failed for decades.

Having been part of the handful of NGO activists that dared to believe that mines could be banned and decided to create ICBL for that purpose, I have had the privilege to witness in particular the crucial role played by Mozambique in the Ottawa process. And beyond Mozambique, African States impressed all stakeholders by their ability - at crucial stages of negotiations that marked the two conventions - to stay united and resist pressures from certain powers, willing for them to remain out of the processes or to lower their objectives. Indeed, I believe that without the determination of a large number of countries from the African continent, the Ottawa and Oslo convention would have failed to achieve the true ban of two types of conventional weapons that have been made illegal.

Our concern today is of a different nature and we are not here to consider a new treaty. We are here because disregard or purposeful violations of internationally agreed humanitarian principles and norms have reached unprecedented levels. Maximizing the suffering of civilians - as part of strategic plans through sieges, indiscriminate shelling in populated areas, targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructures vital for survival - have become routine in many conflict settings and we believe that the community of Nations has reached a moment of truth.

These are not situations restricted to Syria, Yemen and the Middle-East that one could watch from a distance. The African continent was or is directly concerned. Conflicts in Ivory-Coast, Somalia,

Lybia, South-Sudan are evidence. Afghanistan, Gaza and Ukraine are other examples. It is a problem that concerns us all and we should wake up to its reality and dreadful consequences!

Those affected by armed conflicts expect from the international community some kind of assistance and support in times of hardship and distress, but they are badly disappointed. Public opinion around the world is despondant at best, uninterested at worst, when it is not hostile to the waves of forced migrations that follows the devastation.

Nevertheless beyond outrage, we need solutions ! This is why this conference is so important and meaningful. I believe that “we the peoples” should be alarmed, angry at what is going on, and committed to take action to ward off the continuation and worsening of what is primarily a crisis of the duty to protect, a crisis of compliance with existing rules and laws as was clearly stated at a recent conference organized by ICRC in Paris to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Additional Protocols.

Today we are here in Maputo to express our shared concern, our common determination to contribute to restore respect for civilians in warfare and develop perspectives on efficient ways to do so. We are here to identify the plans and actions that a committed group of African States can put forward by joining their strength and influence as they did in previous initiatives on conventional weapons.

Obviously, to “win back the human race” – to paraphrase the legacy of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues in 1987 and its Secretary-General the late Zia Rizvi – will require the re-founding of a collective sense of responsibility of States to restrict the use of certain types of weapons in populated areas, particularly those that are causing most harm to civilians.

So we are here to discuss the ambitious road toward a broadly endorsed International Political Declaration, an initiative that was launched - with a strong involvement from INEW - by the Government of Austria and a Core group of States among which Norway, Mozambique and Senegal. We believe that this goal is attainable as the number of States that are truly alarmed by the deterioration of restraint in warfare is actually growing. During these two days we will share information on the current status of this process and we will outline together the ways to advance a shared ambition, both at the national and international levels, that could have a tremendous impact.

It is common wisdom to affirm that every society is as good as what it allows to happen, and all too often, the impacts of explosive weapons are considered an inevitable result of conflict. Yet there is evidence that militaries can, and often have, refrained from the use of certain weapons in populated areas, and in doing so they have actually strengthened civilian protection. But the tragedy of Aleppo has been described as “being to Syria today what Guernica was to Spain during its civil war. A martyred city and the harbinger of more disasters to come”.

In order to seek change, it is wise to concentrate on the right topic and seize the right moment. We believe that this is it. Data gathered on the harm from explosive weapons over the last five years has shown a consistent pattern: when explosive weapons are used in populated areas, 92% of the victims on average are civilian, a rate and an inversion of proportion which nobody can accept. This is why we must call on all states and non-state actors not only to acknowledge this pattern of harm to individuals and communities but also to strive to avoid such harm.

We believe that it can be done by reviewing and strengthening national policies and practices ; it can be done by developing international standards that would include restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas ; and it can be done by working for the full realisation of rights of victims and survivors. Whilst not developing new law in itself, we believe that a Political Declaration will set a new political standard, provide a framework to develop national measures, and establish an international forum to discuss and assess their effectiveness. It will also contribute to assisting communities affected by the effects of explosive weapons.

In closing, I invite you to remember that your endeavor has its flagship in Geneva, that is “Broken Chair” on Place des Nations. The monument was initially created as the symbol of the victims of antipersonnel landmines, but the Handicap International federal network, which owns Broken Chair recently agreed that it should now be known by visitors as a symbol of:

- The desperate cry of the populations slaughtered by military violence, including the use of explosive ordnance in inhabited areas;
- States’ obligation to protect civil populations, and to rescue the multiplying victims of conflicts.
- The vigilance of the citizens and civil society organizations to ensure that States take responsibility and stand by their commitments.

In that spirit, I encourage you all who are present in Maputo today, to support the development of an ambitious Political Declaration, aiming at stopping the use of the worst types of explosive weapons – those with wide area effects – and being truly conducive to policy and practice that will restore the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Thank you Chair.