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Pope calls for end to land mines, cluster bombs.

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Apr. 6, 2009

VATICAN CITY

Pope Benedict XVI called on nations to end the production, stockpiling and use of land mines and cluster bombs.

He also expressed his support for programs and measures that "guarantee the necessary assistance to victims of such devastating weapons."

The pope made his comments at the end of his midday Angelus prayer April 5 as he recalled the United Nations' International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, which was celebrated April 4.

He noted that 10 years had passed since the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty -- which bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines -- came into effect.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions, which would prohibit all use, stockpiling, production and transfer of cluster bombs and munitions, was recently adopted and is open for signatories, he added.

"I wish to encourage countries that still haven't done so to sign without delay these important instruments of international humanitarian law which the Vatican has always supported," he said.

The Vatican was one of 94 states that signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Dublin, Ireland, in 2008 and was one of four nations that ratified it the same day. The Vatican is also party to the Mine Ban Treaty, which it signed in 1997 and ratified soon after.

Thirty-nine countries, including the United States, China, Russia, most countries in the Middle East and many countries in Asia, have not ratified the anti-personnel mine ban treaty, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions will take effect six months after 30 nations ratify it.

As of April 2009, 96 nations had signed on and only five had ratified the measure. The United States, Russia, China, most Middle Eastern countries and many countries in Asia also have not signed this convention, according to the Convention on Cluster Munitions Web site.

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