

PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ON THE GENERAL STATUS OF THE CONVENTION

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President of the Twelfth Meeting of the States Parties

**Meeting of the Standing Committee on the
General Status and Operation of the Convention**

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Excellencies, dear friends,

As the Co-Chairs have noted, it has been our practice that the President provides an overview of the general status of the Convention. It is my pleasure to do so this year.

Universalization

With respect to universalization, I was delighted that Poland attended the 12MSP at the ministerial level and that the minister in question announced that Poland would accede to the Convention within weeks following the 12MSP. Poland kept its word, depositing its instrument of accession on December 27th, thereby becoming the 161st State to join our movement. The Convention will enter into force for Poland on Saturday, June 1st. With all European Union Member States legally bound by the Convention, Europe is truly united to end the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines.

We now need to ensure that other regional organizations follow the example of the European Union by achieving universal acceptance of the Convention on the part of their Member States. This is indeed possible if we maintain our commitment to universalization. After all, only two Member States of the Organization of America States remain outside the Convention, as is the case for only three African Union members. Equally, only three members of the Pacific Islands Forum have not yet joined the anti-landmines movement.

Stockpile destruction

With respect to stockpile destruction, we should continue to be proud of our collective and national efforts which have resulted in approximately 44.5 million stockpiled mines having been destroyed.

Our record remains slightly tarnished, however, in that three States Parties which failed to comply with their four year deadlines remain in the process of destroying stocks. I am encouraged, though, that the 12MSP's Geneva Progress Report recorded that the stockpile destruction process, which has been stalled in all three cases, appears to be back on track. I am also encouraged that two of the States which most recently joined the Convention – Finland and Poland – have already reported the destruction of significant quantities of landmines.

This week is an opportunity for all States Parties concerned to further inform us of their progress. And this includes those States Parties which have reported previously unknown stockpiles.

Mine clearance

With respect to mine clearance, at the 12MSP, six States Parties – Congo, Denmark, Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Jordan – announced completion of the implementation of their Article 5 obligations. Therefore, as of the close of the 12MSP, 23 of 59 States Parties that had reported anti-personnel mines in mined areas had declared completion. I am confident that this number will grow to at least 25 by the end of the year.

Later today the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance will begin its work. This is a chance for those still in the process of clearing all mined areas to make it absolutely clear to us what remains to be done and what is the plan to join those who have already reported completion.

This applies as well to those States Parties which, after an original or extended deadline to implement Article 5 has expired, have, as an exceptional circumstance, discovered a mined area or areas. You will recall that at the 12MSP, in keeping with this Convention's tradition of innovation and its practical-minded nature, we agreed to a number of political commitments regarding such situations. I am grateful that some States Parties have already acted upon these commitments.

Victim assistance

With respect to victim assistance, I wish to align myself with a very important statement made by Norway at the 12MSP. That is, without a doubt, the situation for the majority of mine victims is significantly better today than it was 15 years ago, primarily as a result of this Convention. Certainly much more is required to respond to the needs and to guarantee the rights of mine victims. After all, even in the most developed countries, the task far from complete in ensuring that landmine survivors as well as other persons with disabilities and / or others whom have suffered life changing injuries may enjoy the full and effective participation in one's society on an equal basis with others.

However, a message that the Convention has failed the victims simply is not correct. I am confident that the collective efforts of this Convention community and that the tens-of-millions generated as a result of this Convention have made a difference. Our challenge is to ensure that we continue to do so.

Cooperation and Assistance

Concerning cooperation and assistance, I was pleased that the Co-Chairs have ensured continuity from discussions in the past, seeking to build upon them. Last year a number of initiatives were discussed to enhance cooperation and assistance under the Convention, including examining the role of various trust funds to support implementation and developing an information exchange mechanism. On Thursday morning, we have a chance to follow up on these matters.

Compliance

Finally, with respect to compliance, let us not shy away from our obligation and our political commitment to work together in an expeditious manner to resolve alleged or known cases of non-compliance.

It is simply the case that, given human imperfection, actions contrary to the Convention's prohibitions could very likely occur. In accepting this fact, we must then also accept that how we will truly be measured will be in terms of how we respond.

Concerns about compliance have come our way in recent years. If this Convention is going to continue to be a model of multilateralism working the way it should, then we have to ensure that we respond to compliance concerns in a serious way and in keeping with this Convention's spirit of cooperation. In addition, if there has been a failure to comply, we need to be forward looking, redoubling our efforts to fulfill our obligation to prevent and suppress prohibited acts.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to thank all States Parties and partner organizations, as well as those of you who represent them.

Interest in this cause has already outlasted what would normally be expected in terms of what you might call a typical attention span. This is good because what we found so important when the Convention was adopted in 1997 remains important today and will continue to be important for years to come, particularly in countries where we find great numbers of landmine survivors.

I applaud public awareness efforts such as those staged by at a high level Belgium and Germany this year to sustain and even increase interest in what amounts to a job not yet complete.

We are certainly well on our way to converting landmines into yesterday's issue. After all, the landmine issue today has evolved greatly since entry into force in 1999. However, we are not quite at the end of the road yet and a further intensity is still required.