

General Statement of Norway
delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad
to the
Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention
Geneva, 16 September, 2002
(check against delivery)

Mr President,

We want to extend our warmest congratulations to you, Ambassador Lint, on your election as President of the fourth meeting of States Parties. It is most appropriate that Belgium holds this position. Belgium was one of the very first countries to wholeheartedly support a total ban on anti-personnel mines, and the first country to nationally prohibit anti-personnel mines. Belgium naturally became one of the pioneers and most active participants in the Ottawa process when it started six years ago. You have yourself, Mr President, become a key person in this movement since you arrived in Geneva. You have personally seen the terror of landmines on your previous posting in Africa. You have made significant contributions to further the implementation of the Mine Ban Convention. We welcome your election and look forward to working with you during this Meeting of State Parties and in the coming year.

We would also like to thank the presidency of the Third Meeting of States Parties, Nicaragua, for their dedicated work over the last year. Nicaragua has through the third meeting of states parties in Managua and to this day most ably brought this important process a long step forward and kept us all focused on the core humanitarian objectives of our endeavours. In particular, we want to thank Minister Councillor Cecilia Sanchez, who with energy wisdom and commitment has had the daily responsibility and chaired the coordinating committee.

Mr President,

On Wednesday the 18 September, it will be exactly five years since the Mine Ban Convention was adopted at the Oslo Diplomatic Conference after three weeks of intensive negotiations. As you, Mr President, and Jody Williams mentioned: Last week the Norwegian Red Cross, the Norwegian People's Aid and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo organised an international conference called "The future of Humanitarian Mine Action" in Oslo to mark this anniversary. The organisers chose, and rightly so, to focus on the future and the practical work in the field. The Mine Ban Convention is the political and legal manifestation of the Ottawa Process. The treaty is not an end in itself, but a tool for meeting our objectives. The Mine Ban Convention is undoubtedly the single most important instrument of International Humanitarian Law created in recent years. Not only has it established a new international norm against anti-personnel mines, it has also set significant new standards that may be a model for solving other humanitarian problems.

Mr President,

For Norway, the Convention is the primary framework for mine action. When the Convention was adopted and later signed in Ottawa in 1997, the Norwegian government pledged USD 120 million for Mine action over a five year period. By the end of this year that pledge will be fulfilled. At the conference in Oslo last week, my government confirmed that Norway will continue to support the fight against the problems caused by anti-personnel mines, both politically and financially, at a similar level as in previous years. We know the magnitude of the challenges ahead of us. We have a long-term commitment, and will continue to work in partnership with others to meet our objectives.

Mr President,

Much has been, and will be, said about the success of the Ottawa process and the Mine Ban Convention. And it is well documented by the four annual editions of the Landmine Monitor. On this occasion I will therefore refrain from counting our victories, but rather remind ourselves that the landmine campaign that was launched in the early 1990s came as a response to a call from the field. It was the people on the ground, the humanitarian workers that were experiencing the misery caused by anti-personnel mines that formed what was to be the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. This is what our work is about: The people, the individual human beings, who suffer from the terror of these mines. Our objective is to prevent new victims and help the survivors. And by victims we mean not only the innocent persons who step on a landmine, but also their families and the communities they live in. This is the essence of what we have to achieve. This is the starting point for all our Mine Action related activities. This is why we are here today.

Mr President,

We all know there is much to be said about the practical impact of treaties and conferences in general. We have often heard NGOs and practitioners say that they cannot waste their time and money on attending meetings like this. But they should be aware that it is this political work that has given us a ban on anti-personnel mines; thereby stopped them from being laid in the ground. And this is how we can mobilise resources. It is at these meetings that practitioners find the policy makers and the funders. This is where the field experience can and needs to be conveyed. Both field workers and mine affected countries should seize the opportunities provided by the Meeting of States Parties and the Intersessional Work Programme. The Intersessional Work Programme serves as an open-ended interface between the realities on the ground and the political work in Geneva and in various capitals.

Equally important is that we, the diplomats and bureaucrats, make full use of these meetings in a positive and constructive way. We should not allow these fora to degenerate into a playing ground for games that are not aimed at addressing problems that the Ottawa process is meant to solve. As soon as these meetings are not seen as useful and relevant to our endeavours in the field, the process will be taken elsewhere.

Mr President,

While we have succeeded in making a change for the better on the ground, we now see the first indications that the funding for Mine Action is stagnating. This comes as no surprise, but demands that in the time to come, we have to give more attention to fund raising and the most effective use of means. We should start addressing resource mobilisation and, more systematically, how human and financial resources are spent. We would suggest that we consider to establish a contact group for resource mobilisation during the next intersessional period.

But, Mr President, whatever we do, the needs on the ground will always exceed what may be available in financial support for Mine Action. We must avoid unnecessary competition and rivalry. Emphasis must be given to utilise existing capabilities and when necessary build and strengthen local capacities. National and local authorities should take the lead and assume the primary responsibility. Recent experiences have in an unfortunate way demonstrated that this is not always the case, where external actors have established an unjustified presence and shown a counterproductive behaviour.

Mr President,

The Intersessional Work Programme has become an essential part of our work and the participation has by far exceeded the initial expectations. This is largely thanks to the hard and collective work of all the individuals serving as co-chairs, co-rapporteurs and the Presidency. We have seen a great qualitative improvement this year due to the establishment of the Implementation Support Unit. We are impressed by and grateful for the tremendous contributions made by the GICHD and the ISU Manager, Mr Kerry Brinkert.

During the past year we have again experienced the importance of the ICRC and the ICBL. The continued presence of ICBL in Geneva has proven to be most valuable. It is indispensable that the ICBL and the ICRC remain fully committed to the issue and actively engaged in the process.

Mr President,

In the coming days we will have ample opportunities to address and discuss the various specific aspects of the Convention and Mine Action both inside and outside the meeting room. But there is one issue I want to comment on. One important task for this Meeting of States Parties is to prepare for the preparatory process for the First Review Conference in 2004. We must establish an orderly, open and transparent process that we all are comfortable with. We find that what is outlined in the President's paper is a good way ahead. The President should be mandated to make the necessary preparations for the required decisions to be taken at the fifth meeting of States Parties in Bangkok next year. I will take this opportunity to confirm that we offer to host the Review Conference in Oslo, should that be seen as a convenient venue by the States Parties.

Mr President,

We look forward to the next days meeting under your able guidance. We hope our discussions will be practical and result-oriented based on the much praised partnerships between mine affected and other countries and between governments and international and non-governmental organisations. Partnerships which have become the trademark of the Ottawa Process.

Thank you, Mr President.