

Statement of Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch
President of the First Review Conference
of the
Mine Ban Treaty

On the occasion of the
Opening Ceremony of the
6th Meeting of States Parties,
Zagreb, Croatia,
27 November, 2005

Mr President!

Mr Mayor!

Your excellencies, friends and colleagues!

Almost to the day a year ago we, the representatives of States Parties and relevant organisations, assembled in Nairobi, Kenya, for the first ever World Summit on a Mine-Free World.

Much energy and effort had been devoted, to turn the Summit into what is now considered a landmark success. Last year we met in a continent that has suffered so appallingly from the scourge of Anti-Personnel Mines - suffered through casualties, human losses and tragedies ... affecting children, women and men alike – not to speak of the serious consequences to economic development and social well-fare.

Now, that we meet in Croatia, it is all too fresh in our minds that this region too, has experienced so much hardship in recent years. While we must remember the suffering, it is now more important to look towards the future - to make it safer, better and brighter for all people living here. The wars on the territory of former Yugoslavia clearly demonstrated to the world that modern warfare affects those the most with the least ability to protect themselves: the innocent civilian population.

By meeting in Zagreb, we acknowledge the leading role of our host-country in the fight against those terrible weapons. And this can be seen both on a national level, that Croatia works hard to fulfil its obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty and internationally, by assuming the responsibility of the Convention's presidency at a crucial point in time.

Mr President, Mr Mayor, it is with some satisfaction that here in Zagreb we gather to take stock of the progress we have achieved in the 12 month since the Nairobi Action Plan was adopted and I am convinced that in the spirit of cooperation we will agree on the priority areas for the work ahead of us in the coming year.

The Mine Ban Treaty is a prime example of effective multilateralism at work!

Mr. President, colleagues and friends:

What we want, what we need and what we work for is a world free of mines:

... a world with no stocks, no minefields and no new victims.

And a world, which takes care of those that already fell victim to this odious weapon.

Simply put: mine action remains a humanitarian must. Yet a multifaceted approach is warranted. The other day I spoke to someone back from a mission in sub-Saharan Africa. He rather sarcastically remarked that there, in this part of the world, where a civil war just had come to a formal end, three categories of roads existed:

high risk roads,
medium risk roads
and roads with risk unknown.

It is all too obvious that under such circumstances timely help is hardly possible, and the suffering will continue long after the ink had dried on the peace treaty. As long as these mine-fields exist, people will continue to die and the return to a decent life will further be postponed.

Mr. President, Mr. Mayor,

Let me have a few word on the region where we meet and where I have spent a considerable part of my life. Croatia is now a country well on its way to become a fully fledged member of the European Union. Only recently its neighbors to the south have entered their first contractual relationship with the Union. And hopefully 2006 will witness a fair and equitable solution to the main remaining challenges left from the conflicts of the 1990ies.

Seemingly, landmines are but a fraction of the wider problem. Yet, becoming mine-free, will arguably speed up the region's full recovery. Every single country in this part of

Europe has by now accepted the Mine Ban Treaty and is well on-track to fulfill its obligations.

Remarkably, they have done so largely through cooperation and assistance within their own region. They have led the way by demonstrating that cooperation and assistance begins at home. No other region has developed comparable implementation structures, including the Ljubljana-based "International Trust Fund" (ITF), the "South Eastern European Mine Action Committee" (SEEMAC), the Stability Pact's Reay Group and, last but not least, the South Eastern European Mine Free Initiative, which enjoy cross-regional participation. Because so much has been done here, it is important to continue with unabated vigor to finish the job.

Mr. President, Mr. Mayor, Colleagues and Friends!

Here in Zagreb we can demonstrate that landmines are a problem that can be solved. We can prove that countries that have overcome wars and violent conflicts, can become free of mines and the terror caused by them.

But we have to be clear: half-measures will not liberate us from these sufferings. We, thus, have to continue with full force, full vigor and full commitment.

Let me end, Mr. President, by wishing Croatia as the incoming presidency all the best for this crucially important task. And we all should work for a successful week, and for continued progress in our common endeavor to put an end to the suffering and casualties caused by Anti-personnel Mines once and for all!

Thank you very much.