

The Ottawa Convention – A Canadian Perspective

Mr. John Michel, High Commissioner of Australia, Ms Susan Gordon, Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Bissembar Jr., Assistant General Counsel, Mr. Brinkert and Ms. Delfolie, Ottawa Convention Implementation Support Unit, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen

I would like to begin this short presentation with a quote from the Nobel Lecture made by Nobel Laureate Jody Williams, when she and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines received the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 January 1997 in Oslo.

“From the third to the fifth of October we met in Ottawa. It was a very fascinating meeting. There were 50 governments there as full participants and 24 observers. The International Campaign was also participating in the conference. The primary objectives of the conference were to develop an Ottawa Declaration, which states would sign signaling their intention to ban landmines, and an "Agenda for Action," which outlined concrete steps on the road to a ban. We were all prepared for that, but few were prepared for the concluding comments by Lloyd Axworthy, the Foreign Minister of Canada. Foreign Minister Axworthy stood up and congratulated everybody for formulating the Ottawa Declaration and the Agenda for Action, which were clearly seen as giving teeth to the ban movement. But the Foreign Minister did not end with congratulations. He ended with a challenge. The Canadian government challenged the world to return to Canada in a year to sign an international treaty banning antipersonnel landmines. Members of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines erupted into cheers. The silence of the governments in the room was deafening. Even the truly pro-ban states were horrified by the challenge. Canada had stepped outside of diplomatic process and procedure and put them between a rock and a hard place.”

And of course States did return to Ottawa a year later, and 122 of them signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

I use this quote only to emphasize that Canada was, and still is, committed to this treaty, but we need to finish the job, all of us, together.

Canada's international mine action cooperation programme, the Canadian Landmine Fund, was established in 1998 following the 1997 opening for signature of the Ottawa Convention. It was funded at the level of \$100 million for 5 years, with those dedicated funds supplemented by at least \$22 million from development programmes over that period. This special Fund was renewed again in 2003, with \$72 million in dedicated resources for a further 5 years.

This second phase of our programme involves a much greater emphasis on mainstreaming mine action programming into our broader international development efforts, that is, using development programme funds to support mine action. This reflects the growing international recognition of the reality that, in most mine-affected countries, landmines present a major obstacle to broader development objectives. During this past year alone under this strategy, almost \$ 15 million in development funds were directed to mine action -- additional to about \$15 million from the dedicated Landmine Fund. In the same vein, we have been working closely with Norway, Thailand and others to encourage increased involvement in mine action by international development and financial agencies.

The Nairobi Summit on a Mine Free World, the First Review Conference on the Ottawa Convention, was held in December 2004. That Summit produced the Nairobi Action Plan. The Plan was developed from a careful review of the progress of the Convention in the first five years of its life. The successes were many:

- the numbers of victims steadily decreasing from year to year;
- millions of stockpiled mines destroyed;
- thousands of kilometres of land returned to productive use;
- an almost total elimination of the market for anti-personnel mines; and
- almost 80% of the countries of the world have agreed to never use, produce, transport or stockpile these weapons and to destroy the stocks that they hold or held.

But we still have a way to go before we can declare victory:

- We need to bring the last 43 countries into the Convention;
- We need some mechanism to ensure that no more mines are laid by armed non-State Actors;
- We need to ensure that we have done, and continue to do, all that we can for the survivors and that there are no new victims;

- We need to clear the millions of mines that still lie dormant until some innocent activates them; and
- As an international community we need to do all that we can to help all States Parties meet all of their obligations;

In February this year, Haiti deposited its instrument of ratification and Canada would like to congratulate Haiti for taking that final step. As a consequence every country in this hemisphere, except the United States and Cuba, are members of the Ottawa Convention.

Canada, for its part, believes the ultimate solution to eradicating the devastating effects of anti-personnel mines is universal adherence to the Ottawa Convention – that is 100% of the Earth's 194, soon to be 195, countries join this Convention and meet all of its obligations. In that vein, as a part of the formal and informal meetings of this Convention, Canada chairs an informal group, the Universalization Contact Group, where States Parties, international organizations and agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations, meet to develop a cohesive strategy toward universalization. Indeed the Nairobi Action Plan obliges States Parties to work diligently toward full universalization of this treaty.

Of course that is about universalizing the Convention. Much work still remains to be done to fully implement it.

The challenges for members of the CARICOM community are unique when faced with implementation the Ottawa Convention. Although implementation in CARICOM countries did not call up the requirement to destroy large stockpiles, clear vast mined areas, or treat and assist mine victims, other responsibilities of the Convention remain, such as continuing universalization efforts, the implementation of domestic legislative measures, as well as regular reporting requirements. In many cases the resources available within the Caribbean Community make it a challenge to fully participate in all aspects of the universalization and implementation process.

We hope that this workshop provides an opportunity to find practical, effective and efficient ways to overcome some of these challenges, and to allow CARICOM countries to play the significant role in mine action which we know you are eager to play.

Canada remains committed to the goal of a world free of antipersonnel mines and encourages all CARICOM members to continue to work toward that goal. If we focus our efforts we can finish the job, and ensure that there are, no more victims.