

# 16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

High Level Opening Segment  
18.12.2017

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Anti-personnel mines are insidious weapons that kill civilians even decades after the end of conflicts. Anti-personnel Mines prevent the use of land for agriculture, they block children from taking the path to the nearest school, and they cause misery and poverty. It was the horrific and indiscriminate impact of anti-personnel mines that led to the conviction that there is only one solution: To ban them.

Twenty years ago an unprecedented partnership between states, civil society and the ICRC culminated in the signing of the Mine Ban Convention.

The treaty is multilateralism at its best. The shared humanitarian concern motivated countries from all regions of the world to take part in a series of conferences known as the *Ottawa Process*. Within a year committed States, civil society and the ICRC brought about the convention, a definite and comprehensive prohibition. Austria invited to the first international meeting on the text of a convention here in the Vienna International Center. It was in February 1997 when 111 Countries participated in discussing first elements of the future treaty. In a series of follow-up conferences the final draft of the convention was developed.

So the convention has come home today to the place where its drafting started and I am delighted to welcome you all here. This Meeting of States Parties is truly a special one. We can proudly celebrate the twenty years anniversary, because the convention has saved tens of thousands lives and delivered great results in all its areas.

It was also in December twenty years ago, when the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and Jody Williams – who joined us today - were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In the same month of December 1997, the treaty was opened for signature in Ottawa. I am proud to say that Austria has been among the leading countries pushing for a comprehensive prohibition from the earliest days and I am delighted to welcome you twenty years later here in Vienna.

The process of negotiations of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction opened a new era in multilateral disarmament. The progress on the norm against anti-personnel mines and its results are historic. Twenty years later there is no doubt that things have actually changed on the ground. Millions of people are direct or indirect beneficiaries of the treaty.

Today, the mine ban treaty is among the most universal disarmament instruments. It gives me great pleasure to announce that Sri Lanka has acceded to the Convention, bringing the number of States Parties to 163.

The stigmatization effect of the weapon and political pressure due to increased awareness on the humanitarian dimension extends well beyond its States Parties.

Over the past two decades, the use of antipersonnel mines has fallen sharply. Given the lack of demand, international trade in anti-personnel mines has practically ceased. Only a handful of countries have used mines in recent years. Even though the obligation to protect civilians from unnecessary harm applies to all States, we must not relent in our universalisation efforts. Recent reports on use of anti-personnel mines in Myanmar are a grim reminder thereof.

Under the Convention over 53 million stockpiled mines reported have been destroyed by 90 States Parties. We can hardly imagine the human suffering those 53 million mines could have caused. The completion of stockpile destruction in Belarus earlier this year with EU assistance constitutes another success of cooperation under the convention. I also take great pleasure in congratulating Algeria on becoming mine-free in 2017.

Twenty-seven States Parties have completed mine clearance. We have developed and deployed more efficient and effective clearance methods through humanitarian demining. Vast areas of land were brought back to productive use providing the opportunity for many people to rebuild lives and livelihoods. By the halt of use, stockpile destruction and clearance, countless victimization of countless human beings has been prevented.

The provisions on victim assistance in the treaty were an innovation. They have contributed to improving the lives of victims worldwide. Nevertheless, we still we cannot be satisfied with the living conditions of survivors and their families. We need to keep people at the heart of the Convention.

The constant participation of survivors in the meetings has served as a reality check; with their valuable experience our joint actions became more effective.

When the ICBL started recording victims in the 90es, they registered 30.000 victims per year. Unfortunately the usual trend of considerable reduction has been reversed lately, since nowadays improvised explosive devices are being used a lot by non-state actors such as ISIS. In the fight against this worrying development it helps that improvised anti-personnel mines are covered by the convention.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Anti-Personnel Mines hinder socio-economic development. Mine action is intrinsically linked to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. In mine-affected countries demining, risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction are key element towards reconstruction in a post-conflict context.

Twenty years after the adoption of the convention its content is more relevant than ever. It is about saving lives and returning land to use. But it is also about our sustained commitment. Building on our achievements we need to effectively address the remaining challenges. In Maputo we have set ourselves the goal to free the world from the plight of anti-personnel mines by 2025. We can meet this objective, but only if we redouble our efforts.

Austria is proud to host this meeting at such a critical juncture and will make its contribution to reaching our common goal: a mine-free world.

I wish you a successful conference that brings us closer to fulfilling this promise of the convention.