

ICBL Opening Remarks

*21 MSP Mine Ban Treaty Intersessional Meeting
Geneva, 20-24 November 2023*

Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour to present the opening remarks on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. I work with the Sri Lanka Campaign to Ban Landmines, and am one of the Youth Fellows brought by ICBL member Mines Action Canada.

As many of you are aware, Sri Lanka faced a protracted civil war which resulted in heavy landmine contamination, with an estimated 1.6 million anti-personnel mines threatening the lives of Sri Lankans after the war. Today, nearly 14 years later, Sri Lanka stands as a mine action success story thanks to the support of the government, the donor community, national and international demining organizations as well as civil society. And of course, we must also recognize and applaud the efforts and sacrifices of the deminers, who risk their lives every day to make their communities safe. It is because of them that we will be able to 'finish the job' before our original deadline in 2028. As one of the female deminers in Sri Lanka said, "I work joyfully with the aim that the people in this area will not be injured from explosions and lose their limbs anymore."

And though Sri Lanka is fast moving towards being declared free of landmines, we are sad to see many other affected countries lagging behind with their clearance work and not getting closer to becoming mine-free any time soon. We all must reflect on why this is so and do something to change it. We must also think about what happens after we cross that crucial finish line in Sri Lanka. We need to make sure the individuals that have contributed immensely towards making communities safe are not forgotten through proper demobilisation.

In the ICBL tradition, the Sri Lanka Campaign to Ban Landmines has worked closely with the Government of Sri Lanka to encourage them first to join the treaty and to support its rapid implementation, including not just clearance, but development and implementation of a law prohibiting anti-personnel mines, as well as implementation of local legislation for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Sri Lankan Campaign is also partnering with the Government of Sri Lanka to support the universalization of the treaty in the Asian region, sharing our success story to inspire other countries to join us in creating a landmine-free Asia and landmine-free world. It has been a long time since we last saw a new state joining our treaty, with Sri Lanka and Palestine the last ones to do so in 2017.

Mr. President, I have been speaking about Sri Lanka as one of the many, many cases where the Mine Ban Treaty has had a positive, lasting impact. Our population will soon join many others who do not need to live in fear of losing a limb from the simple act of taking a step.

Millions of mines have been destroyed from stocks and cleared areas. States are devoting much more attention to the rights of landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities. The norm and mechanisms established by the Convention have served as models for other humanitarian disarmament initiatives.

At the same time, the treaty has faced a number of bumps along the road towards full implementation and universalization. Completion of clearance obligations has slowed to a trickle, with some countries asking for multiple extensions without clear and compelling reasons. Donors have been generous to the mine action world, but not always in an equitable manner to all states in need. Landmine survivors are still waiting for services that should have been provided long ago. Stockpile destruction deadlines have been missed, with a few states still in non-compliance many years afterwards.

Through all these challenges, however, the community of States Parties, civil society, the ICRC, UN agencies, and other stakeholders have stood together in a united manner to encourage progress and reiterate the essential value of our common work. It is an exceptional convention, with an exceptional body of actors making it work.

Today, unfortunately, we need this cohesive voice more than ever as we are facing the ultimate test of the Convention and its norms: new use of antipersonnel mines on a scale we have not seen in years, including massive use by a non-state party on the territory of a State Party, and also use by that State Party itself. As we know, the Mine Ban Treaty does not permit any exceptions on the prohibition on use, no matter what dire circumstances a State Party might face, and no matter who is the aggressor. Indeed, the treaty was designed exactly for this purpose: to protect civilians from these hideous, indiscriminate weapons in the midst of conflict. The ICBL is counting on all States Parties to speak up this week to reinforce this message; to condemn all use by anyone, anywhere; to ask for details of the investigation of use; and to seek clarity on what steps are being taken to ensure mines will never again be used. The Mine Ban Treaty has faced tests before and has always come out stronger than ever. We know this can be the case again.

In closing, the ICBL looks forward to a productive week of discussions on this issue, and all core elements of the convention. As always, we will be pleased to share findings from the newly released 2023 Landmine Monitor report throughout the week.

Thank you.