

Speech for the Opening Ceremony

5th Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty, Siem Reap, Cambodia 25-29 November 2024

Your Excellency, esteemed delegates,

My name is Wurood Talib, an activist with the Iraqi Disabled Persons Union, representing landmine and war remnants survivors. I experienced a disability at a young age. I was on a trip with my family in an open area, playing and enjoying myself, when suddenly there was a loud explosion and a huge shock. I didn't feel pain, but I felt like my life had ended amidst darkness and dust. I lost my leg. It was like the fear of death. I left the hospital with two crutches I had never touched before in my life.

I left school, abandoned my friends, and isolated myself at home in a terrible psychological state. Over time, more relatives and friends visited me, and I began socializing again through my mobile phone. I felt the importance of returning to my normal life. Eventually, I joined the Iraqi Disabled Persons Union, where I witnessed many examples of people successfully overcoming their disabilities. And several years later, I stand proudly before you as an activist, speaking out at local, national and international conferences for the rights of persons with disabilities, especially landmine and ERW survivors.

My focus has been on promoting the integration of people with disabilities into society and highlighting the vital role they play in their communities. In particular, girls with disabilities have immense potential but few opportunities. My focus is on job opportunities in both the public and private sectors. The laws affirm our right to work, and we must translate these rights into action. For example, I work on a project called "Our Prosperity" that encourages the private sector to employ survivors and other persons with disabilities in advanced agriculture and development. This project also helped me gain a stable economic resource and transformed my life into one of self-reliance. I now want to help others do likewise.

I am honored to be here in Cambodia today not only to tell my personal story, but as a representative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, a global campaign of civil society organizations with its origins in Cambodia. The devastating impact of massive landmine contamination here and elsewhere prompted a group of NGOs to launch our campaign in 1992 and to work with partners until the treaty was adopted five years later. The tireless work of Cambodian survivor advocates like Tun Channareth have inspired me and other survivors to turn our challenging personal experience into an opportunity to effect positive change.

Cambodia's own journey - from a country ravaged by mine contamination to a model of national ownership on mine action and a global leader for the convention - serves as an inspiration to us all, and the ICBL places great value on our close partnership.

Your Excellency, at this 5th Review Conference we can all be proud of what has been collectively achieved over the past 25 years. As documented in the Landmine Monitor, the transformation of countless lives that has occurred because of the convention is quite simply remarkable, and should not be taken for granted.

At the same time, as the voice of survivors and affected communities, the ICBL will always speak openly about the challenges that threaten our hard-won progress. We say it all in our slogan for this week: Eliminate landmines and empower lives: No excuses, no exceptions, no delays.

No excuses means no excuse to use landmines, ever! Your Excellency, this week we were shocked to learn that the United States plans to transfer antipersonnel mines to Ukraine. If Ukraine accepts and uses these mines it would be in flagrant violation of the Mine Ban Treaty. The ICBL condemns the US' decision to transfer mines, and we call on Ukraine to respect its treaty obligations and reject these abhorrent weapons. Landmines were banned because of the horrific harm they inflict on civilians, and this is as true today as it was 25 years ago. As we said back then, there are no exceptions, no reservations, and no loopholes to our convention! There are absolutely NO conditions under which it is acceptable for a State Party to use AP mines.

No excuse to use also applies to states not parties. We are sadly faced with massive ongoing use by Russia and Myanmar causing large numbers of new casualties, as well as new use by Iran, North Korea, and several non-state armed groups. The struggle to end landmine use is clearly not over. To win it, we need clear, consistent condemnation of any use of antipersonnel mines by any actor, under any circumstances, plus more intensive efforts on universalization.

No exceptions means all landmine survivors' rights must be upheld. We call for political, economic, and social inclusion of all survivors and persons with disabilities. We recommend a stronger framework for mental health support, rehabilitation services, economic opportunities, and educational access for victims so no one is left behind. And the voices of survivors and affected communities must be integral to our efforts. These steps are not just obligations—they are a moral imperative to restore dignity and hope to those of us who have suffered unimaginable harm.

No delays means taking all steps to clear land as efficiently as possible. In 2014, States Parties pledged to finish clearance obligations by 2025. It was an aspirational goal, and we knew some states could not meet it. But many more states could have met the goal with more ownership, commitment and resources. We must remember that delays in clearance have a *real, life-threatening impact* on people's lives, as I know firsthand. We call on this community to challenge old ways of doing things and look for solutions that will bring peace of mind and safety to communities more quickly.

In closing, Mr. Prime Minister, I am proud to stand alongside you to celebrate the many successes of our convention, which has been a shining example in the disarmament world for 25 years. On behalf of myself and other survivors, I call all States Parties to keep our convention strong by showing your unwavering commitment to ridding the world of landmines through words and their actions, this week and beyond.

Thank you.