

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Review Conference

Siem Reap, Cambodia

Australia – Intervention – High-Level Segment

25 November 2024

Delivered by The Hon Kim Beazley AC, Chair, Council of the Australian War Memorial

President,

We thank the Royal Government of Cambodia for hosting this Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in the 25th anniversary year of the Convention's entry into force. Australia is pleased to see the Review Conference held in this region for the first time. In a sense, it has come to its spiritual home. The issue is a global one with many affected, but it was the events here that provided the momentum.

Australia has a long history of support to Cambodia on mine action. It was our great pleasure to provide further support to assist with the considerable task of hosting this Conference.

As we reflect on the achievements of the Convention in its 25th anniversary year, so too do I as Australian War Memorial Chair reflect on the important role the Memorial plays in assisting us all in remembering, interpreting and understanding Australia's experience of war and its enduring impact. And, fittingly, as we come together here in Siem Reap, it also commemorates the service of Australians who served in peacekeeping missions to Cambodia.

President,

A world free of Anti-Personnel Mines remains a priority for Australia. We support universalisation of the Convention and its full implementation by States Parties.

Anti-Personnel Mines can pose a disproportionate threat to civilian populations and host nations prospects of rebuilding in a post-conflict environment.

These mines do not distinguish between civilians and combatants. The victims are diverse and include families, children, merchants, humanitarian workers, and UN peacekeepers.

Here in South-East Asia, Australia is deeply concerned by the widespread use of landmines in Myanmar. Disturbing data released by UNICEF shows a 270 per cent increase in casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war in Myanmar last year compared with 2022. Tragically, children accounted for more than 20 percent of the total.

According to the Landmine Monitor, there are at least 58 States contaminated with anti-personnel mines. There is still much to do to achieve a landmine free world.

Australia recognises that international assistance and cooperation is critical in achieving this shared goal. For Australia's delivery of assistance, our region, and the significant challenges it faces, remains a priority.

Australia's longstanding program to remove unexploded ordnance - Operation RENDERSAFE - continues to support our Pacific Island family.

Through the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), Australia has also invested in a major multi-year uplift in our international assistance, with a focus on our region aimed at achieving a mine impact-free Pacific.

Tomorrow, Australia will host a side event on 'Strengthening Rehabilitation and Disability Inclusion' which I encourage you to attend. The event will share lessons learned, opportunities and challenges in integrating victim assistance into broader frameworks here in Cambodia.

Australian funding to the GICHD enables the organisation to carry out the critical work of the APMBC Implementation Support Unit. This includes the provision of technical support to all State Parties on the implementation of the Convention.

President,

Mines of an improvised nature – or IEDs - threaten peace and security and remain a weapon-of-choice for non-state actors. They have a disproportionate impact on civilians who have been reported to account for more than 80 percent of all IED-related casualties. Australia together with France and Nigeria continue to press for global action through our UN General Assembly Resolution on ‘Countering the threat posed by Improvised Explosive Devices’. This resolution strongly encourages States to develop and implement national measures to counter IEDs, while also encouraging greater international cooperation and assistance. We thank States for their continued support for the Resolution.

President,

As we look to the future of the Convention and reaching our demining goals, we should consider how new and emerging technologies can be best applied. Assistive technology, including mobility devices, is essential in the delivery of victim assistance. Technology can also make the job of our courageous mine clearance operators safer. These technologies present opportunities for mitigating the risks in areas such as detecting, mapping and removal of unexploded ordnance, including landmines. Australia, through our principal science and research institutions, is keenly engaged in researching innovative solutions to the unexploded ordnance risk reduction challenges, including remote detection, ground penetrating radar, and detection algorithms.

President,

We thank you for your stewardship in the development of the Siem Reap-Angkor Declaration and its accompanying Action Plan. The Declaration acknowledges the progress since the Convention's inception with near-universal adherence, while also recognising the challenges and the terrible casualties that regrettably persist. The Action Plan contains realistic efforts to address the challenges that all States Parties can commit to undertaking over the next five years. Australia is pleased to renew its commitment to a safer future and looks forward to a positive outcome on the Declaration and Action Plan.