

STATEMENT BY STATE SECRETARY MR MARKO ŠTUCIN
European Regional Conference: Advancing Victim Assistance and Cooperation
Special Opening Session
(Ljubljana, 27-29 August 2024)

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Ljubljana for this regional conference on advancing the implementation of Victim Assistance and enhancing cooperation among the countries of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Tajikistan.

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention is a cornerstone of disarmament efforts and a testament to the success of effective multilateralism and disarmament diplomacy.

In light of the Fifth Review Conference of this Convention that will be hosted by Cambodia later this year, it is an honour to have His Excellency Mr. Ly Thuch, President of the Review Conference, with us today.

Dear colleagues, seeing how many experts and participants are gathered here today, I am confident that the Ljubljana conference will make a significant contribution to the journey towards the Siem-Reap Summit on a Mine-Free World, where a new 5-year Action Plan and Political Declaration will be adopted.

The Ottawa Convention is highly respected by the Slovenian public, which comes as no surprise given the turmoil in the Western Balkans during the 1990s. Therefore, it is a privilege for Slovenia to chair the Convention's Committee on Victim Assistance this year, as we celebrate 25 years since the Convention came into force.

Ladies and gentlemen, being here today, we also have to acknowledge that despite the significant progress made over the past 25 years, anti personnel mines continue to cause humanitarian and development challenges, particularly for civilian populations. These devices continue to claim lives and hinder the return of refugees and displaced persons; obstruct humanitarian aid operations, reconstruction, and economic development and delay the restoration of normal social conditions.

We deeply regret the increased use of mines in recent armed conflicts around the world which is unacceptable and reminds us again of the importance of our work.

Slovenia fulfilled its obligations under the Convention in 2003 and continues to support the efforts of other states, primarily through the work of the International Trust Fund for Enhancing Human Security (ITF). Founded in 1998, only 4 months after signing the Convention, its purpose at that time was to assist mine-affected countries from the Western Balkan region. Thanks to the financial support of many donors, particularly the United States, the ITF extended its activities and is now operating in over 20 countries and territories around the globe.

While we fight for our common goal - a world free of anti-personnel mines - we must acknowledge that, yes, contaminated land can be cleared and restored, however the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines stays.

This is why Victim Assistance remains a crucial aspect of the Convention, offering a vital link between mine action and broader development goals, including human rights, health, and education. Achieving the full, equal, and effective participation of mine victims in society is also our duty.

In our view, one of our key tasks today is to assist mine victims from Ukraine and to continue with humanitarian demining. In this context, I would reiterate Slovenia's full support to Ukraine.

Sustainable support for mine victims is essential, especially at the critical juncture when mine clearance under Article 5 of the Convention is completed, because the dismantling of National Mine Action Centres can lead to a lack of coordinated assistance. This makes it necessary to have a clear strategy for the continuity of Victim Assistance, as any gaps in support could undermine the progress achieved over the past decades.

I would also like to highlight two additional aspects relevant to Victim Assistance that should not be overlooked. Gender as well as mental health and psychosocial support. Both aspects will remain key priorities of Slovenian foreign policy.

Dear colleagues, given your expertise and knowledge, I am confident that over the next two and half days the discussions you have will be meaningful.

We may come from different backgrounds, with different stories and experiences, but our gathering here shows that we all share the same, common goal: to prevent civilian deaths and personal tragedies, and to support the victims of these weapons so that they can lead full and meaningful lives with dignity.

To conclude, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has joined us for this important event. I extend special thanks to the Convention's Implementation Support Unit, under the leadership of Director Juan Carlos Ruan, for your outstanding efforts in organizing this regional conference, and to the European Union for their financial support. Also special thanks to my colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that the Ottawa Convention will continue to serve as a global inspiration for many years to come and bring us to our ultimate goal: a world free of anti-personnel mines.

I Thank you.