

ICBL Statement for the Opening Ceremony

22nd Meeting of States Parties, Mine Ban Treaty

Geneva, 1-5 December 2025

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, fellow campaigners,

My name is Alex Munyambabazi, a landmine survivor from Uganda and director of the Amputee Self Help Network Uganda. I am proud to take the floor today on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. I stand here today not only as a survivor, but as someone who has dedicated his life to helping others rebuild theirs — through rehabilitation, peer support, and advocacy for a mine-free world.

My journey begins with loss. I lost my father shortly after I was born, and I was separated from my mother soon after. Growing up without parents meant growing up without certainty — education, stability, and opportunity were things I had to fight for on my own.

At 17, desperate to stay in school, I joined Simba Football Club, which was run by the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces. Football was my only pathway to remain in class, and it eventually led me into basic military training. At that age, I did not fully understand the risks I was stepping into; I simply wanted a chance at a future.

At 22, a landmine changed everything. In one moment, I went from a young man with dreams to a survivor navigating pain, trauma, and an uncertain future. The months after my injury were some of the hardest of my life — filled with physical struggle, emotional weight, and the silence that surrounds trauma. But within that darkness, purpose began to take shape.

I realized that no one should have to face such a journey alone. It was from this belief that I founded the Amputee Self-Help Network Uganda— a community built by survivors, for survivors, rooted in empathy, dignity, and shared resilience.

Determined to rebuild my life, I returned to school — starting again from high school — and went on to earn two medical degrees and am now beginning my medical career. These achievements are not just academic milestones; they represent survival, determination, and the power of refusing to give up.

My lived experience guides everything I do as a disability and survivor's rights expert and advocate. I stand today as someone shaped by loss, strengthened by the solidarity of the Mine Action community, and driven by the belief that every survivor deserves the chance to reclaim their future. Through the promise of the Mine Ban Treaty, hope was restored — for me and for countless others around the world.

Madame President, today, that hope is being tested.

We are witnessing unprecedented setbacks: Russia and Myanmar are using mines with callous disregard for civilians' lives. Use is ongoing by non-state armed groups, and there are allegations of use by two States Parties. This year five countries took the shocking and highly regrettable step to withdraw from this treaty, turning their back on the landmine ban just when it might need to be applied.

But today we are facing a threat of unmatched proportions. Ukraine announced in July that it was suspending its Mine Ban Treaty obligations, which is not just incomprehensible, it is also unlawful. This treaty was designed for times of conflict, and its prohibitions apply under any circumstances, with no exceptions and no reservations. If a state can set aside its obligations temporarily to fight a war, then the ban becomes meaningless.

And the gravity of the situation goes far beyond this convention. If the attempted suspension goes unchallenged, other states may understand that they can suspend membership of any disarmament or humanitarian law convention when facing their own dire threats. We must prevent this precedent from being set. The best way to do so is for this meeting to state unambiguously that *suspension of the convention is not permitted*.

This issue is not political. It is not about any one country. It is an existential threat for all conventions that protect civilians in conflict, and it must be treated as such by all those committed to upholding international law.

These developments strike at the very heart of the humanitarian values that united us in Ottawa nearly three decades ago. And yet, what is perhaps most painful is the silence. Silence as the ban on landmines is openly questioned. Silence as states begin to walk away from the treaty. Silence when survivors and affected communities are watching and wondering whether the world still cares.

For those of us who live with the consequences of landmines every day, this is not a distant policy issue; it is personal. Each mine left in the ground is a child who cannot play safely, a farmer who cannot till his land, a survivor who cannot access the rehabilitation or psychosocial care they desperately need. Each new mine laid is an added risk; an added insult to our long campaign to rid the world of these hidden killers.

Colleagues and friends, this convention has led to unquestionable progress over the years. And we heartily celebrate all it has achieved. But we still face real challenges. In Uganda, across Africa, and around the world, survivors still struggle to access physical rehabilitation, mental health support, and economic opportunities, and financial support for victim assistance is now falling. Without sustained political will and funding, our journey toward full inclusion remains incomplete.

In addition, 2025 was meant to be the year the world declared itself mine-free. An aspirational goal was set at the Third Review Conference over 10 years ago to inspire greater urgency among states. Instead, we have fallen terribly short, with only 5 countries completing clearance since then.

Madame President, in these extraordinary times, we need extraordinary leadership.

So let us recommit today to the spirit of the Mine Ban Treaty:

- To stand firmly behind the total prohibition of landmines and condemn any use, under any circumstances.
- To affirm clearly that suspension of this treaty is not permitted.
- To encourage all states to join, and do everything possible to prevent any more from leaving.
- To accelerate clearance efforts and fulfill the promises made to affected communities.
- To uphold the rights and dignity of survivors everywhere.

The Mine Ban Treaty has always been more than a legal instrument — it is a moral commitment to humanity. It holds enormous promise, and we all have the power to realize its vision.

So together, let us defend it, strengthen it, and ensure that no one else, anywhere in the world, has to live with the legacy of landmines.

Thank you.