

Item 9F: Universalizing the Convention
Statement by Belgium

Madam President,
Excellencies,
Dear members of the mine-action community,

We warmly welcome the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Kingdom of Tonga to this family of nations, bringing us one step closer to a mine-free Pacific. Their commitment illustrates that the appeal of this Convention and its humanitarian objectives continues to resonate. These accessions, the first since 2017, reenergize our collective efforts to universalise the norm enshrined in this Convention.

I would also like to express Belgium's appreciation for the steps States not yet party to the convention have already taken to adhere to the spirit and to a number of principles and norms shared within the Convention. We are heartened by the news that the Federated States of Micronesia are making strides forward towards accession. Belgium encourages all States that have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Convention.

At the same time, five European States have taken the decision to withdraw from the Ottawa Convention, against the backdrop of a deteriorating security landscape caused by Russia's complete disrespect for the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of its neighbours. We thank these States for being present here today. Although not an alternative to being party to this Convention, Belgium hopes that they keep on subscribing to the humanitarian objectives of this Convention, and continue to strive jointly for a world free of anti-personnel mines.

Madam President,

Even in our right to self-defence we are governed by certain rules. If not, we could witness the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In the same vein, we recognize that International Humanitarian Law does not operate on the basis of reciprocity.

Belgium firmly believes that an adequate military and security defence does not hinge on the use of anti-personnel mines, and that their use cannot be reconciled with International Humanitarian Law. The military utility of these crude weapons will never outweigh their humanitarian cost. This calculus was made three decades ago and remains as relevant today.

When negotiating the Convention in the 1990s, our predecessors were not naïve. This was not a conflict free era. On the contrary, brutal conflicts in Africa, Europe and South-East Asia saw the widespread use of these crude weapons, and their catastrophic consequences for local populations. Our collective conviction was, and continues to be, that anti-personnel mines have no place in our world.

Madam President,

The Ottawa Convention does not allow for the suspension of a State Party's obligations. My country has formally objected to this notion. At the time of negotiation, our predecessors rejected this notion, as it would defeat the purpose of the Convention and go against the aims it seeks to achieve.

The Convention's obligations thus remain binding, at all times and under all circumstances, consistent with the Convention's object and purpose, and in accordance with international law. We, therefore, call upon all States Parties to honour their obligations under this Convention.

Madam President,

Let me conclude by expressing our hope that together we can continue to build on the success stories of this Convention, and that the stigma that surrounds the use of these weapons will be upheld.

I thank you.