

ICBL Opening Remarks

by Tun Channareth

Mine Ban Treaty Intersessional Meeting, Geneva, 17-20 June 2025

Madame President, Excellencies, Friends of the Mine Ban Treaty.

Peace to you! I want peace for us all. Our world is crying with wounds of war, children dying, new mines being made and laid, even drones drop them on innocent civilians. Displacement, death, fear. We, who gather here, need to be leaders of reconciliation, disarmament, and peace where every person from every country counts.

50 years ago, my country, Cambodia, was in crisis. I was expelled at gunpoint from my home by the Khmer Rouge, forced to walk 250 km to the countryside. My father was killed, and at fifteen I was separated from my family to be in a youth camp doing hard labor. Imprisoned for eating a cassava, I was beaten, tortured, taken to a well each day to smell the stench of death and see the stains of blood. I too was threatened with death. That is what war can be like.

After five years the Khmer Rouge were defeated and my family was able to return to Phnom Penh. There I was afraid again as civil war between different factions continued. Eventually I ran to a border refugee camp where all young men had to become soldiers. I fell in love and began my family. One dreadful day I went deep into the forest and stepped on a landmine. I wanted to kill myself, but my friends rushed me on bamboo planks to Khao I Dang hospital in Thailand. There both my legs were amputated. After months I returned to my refugee hut in the camp and to my small family, but I was in despair. I just sat and stared into space. Only the call of my daughter, "Daddy, all the other kids have money to buy a candy; why not me?" forced me to learn a new skill so I could earn some money.

Thirteen years in a refugee camp in a wheelchair - that is the consequence of war and landmines. Repatriated to my homeland, I worked alongside other soldiers, former enemies, in the Centre of the Dove in Kandal designing wheelchairs. We were all former soldiers; we were all missing legs; and we became friends as we helped other survivors. From there in 1994 we sent a letter to the world. It said:

Please stop making and using and selling anti-personnel mines.

Please clear the mines.

Please help the victims.

We delivered **2 million signatures** to this letter from all around the world - in cardboard boxes - to the 1996 UN meeting here in Geneva.

And you know well in 1997 the treaty to ban landmines was signed by 122 countries.

Although our treaty has achieved much, very much, since then - this basic cry remains. Today in 2025 our priorities still are:

ONE: No use, no production, no transfer of antipersonnel landmines anywhere, by anyone, at any time.

We strongly condemn the use of mines by Russia in Ukraine, use of mines in Myanmar, and **any** new use anywhere and call on States Parties to condemn this use as well.

We call on Poland, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia **not to withdraw** from our treaty and not to bring landmines back. I am a living proof of the consequence of using mines for border protection. Do you want this to happen to your people? To your children?

TWO: Clearance of all mined areas as rapidly as possible.

We thank all generous donors and all courageous deminers and urge continued generous response. We congratulate those countries who have made so much progress in their clearance and we call on those going slowly to step up and finish the job!

We honour the lives of those who died or were injured doing this work.

THREE: Empowerment and assistance to survivors and mine affected communities.

The ICBL calls for the participation of survivors in the policy decisions that affect their lives and for funding for rehabilitation, assistance and peer support groups.

FOUR: Effective risk education programmes in mine affected areas to prevent further deaths and suffering.

Why are we survivors of landmines so committed to these priorities? I ask myself what led me - a prisoner of the Khmer Rouge, a displaced refugee in a camp, a soldier who lost two legs to a landmine in faraway Cambodia to speak so personally here today?

I know that my own suffering makes me want peace and safety for others. But when I look down at the space where my legs once were, I wonder if there can ever be a world of justice and peace, where landmines no longer threaten innocent people. I wonder again and I hope and I pray because deep inside I believe that together we can build this world of peace, and certainly we can build a world where there are no more landmines ever!

Many committed people, including many diplomats and many political leaders, have led the way in the past, and today we need their continued leadership more than ever. We need you all to say loudly and clearly that no state should leave our dear convention. Will you tell everyone: “We **must not go backwards** on our commitment to ban these disgraceful weapons”?

Let us ban the landmines in our own hearts and in the vision of our nations. Let us together heal the wounds of war and build a culture of peace and reconciliation. May our meeting have very, very good results.

Now let me present to you Madame President **two international appeals** in support of the Mine Ban Treaty and **calling for the five withdrawing states to reconsider their decisions.**

The **first appeal has been signed by over 100 Nobel Laureates** including 19 Nobel Peace Prize winners, among them ICBL and our founding coordinator Jody Williams.

The **second appeal** has been signed to date by **over 20 eminent persons** including 3 former prime ministers, 8 former foreign ministers, 3 former defense ministers, **including from Finland**, 3 former senior United Nations officials and a former general, among others.

Copies of these appeals and their signatories can be found on tables outside the room and on the ICBL website.

Thank you.