

## ICBL Statement on Universalization

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

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Thank you, Madam President.

The ICBL welcomes the Marshall Islands into the convention and celebrates the promising developments in Tonga. We continue to urge states still outside the convention to join, and has met recently with Russia to urge them to stop their widespread use of antipersonnel mines in Ukraine.

The ICBL is profoundly saddened and deeply disturbed by the planned withdrawals of Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. We **truly understand** the fears that promoted the decisions, but antipersonnel mines WILL NOT solve the problem. Instead, they will cause long-term insecurity for their own populations, turning fields and forests into highly dangerous, no-go zones for long years after any conflict ends.

We have heard justifications for their decisions, and we would like to address a few of them briefly because we are extremely concerned where the logic of these types of arguments will lead us in the future.

*First, these countries say their security situation has deteriorated.* That may be so, but the goal of IHL is to govern military behavior *if ever a state is involved in armed conflict*. So it shows remarkably bad faith to walk away from IHL commitments the day conflict may actually be on the horizon. If countries with a worsening security situation decide to leave IHL instruments so that they don't have to apply their rules, such logic would put us down a **dangerous slippery slope**.

Additionally, though the security situation for these five states has indeed evolved, **the nature of antipersonnel landmines has not**. They still cannot be aimed at a soldier, they still cannot choose their victims. This means they will usually miss their intended military target and lie in wait until the first person comes along, which is almost always a civilian, and far too often a child.

*Second, these states say they will do "Anything and everything to protect their civilians,"* But states long ago decided that the means and methods of warfare are not unrestricted; that there are indeed limits to the "anything and everything" of war. Certain red lines remain –and antipersonnel landmines should remain firmly behind them, along with other forbidden weapons like chemical weapons. Because a norm is a norm, in good times and bad. And faithful, unflinching respect for such norms is what sets certain countries apart from others.

*Third, the states say that antipersonnel mines will deter Russia and are essential for their defense.* They say the situation in Ukraine proves this point, but we have not seen any evidence to back up the claim. There's also a lack of clarity about what types of landmines they are referring to: antipersonnel, antivehicle, or command-detonated. That distinction matters.

As well, over the past 2 years, **after** Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, the armed forces of Estonia, Finland, and Latvia concluded that they still **did not want or need antipersonnel mines**. They said that there are alternatives to AP mines that will be **more effective** and **less dangerous** to their own soldiers and civilian populations. They also know that mines on the border will only briefly delay an invading force given today's mine breaching equipment. Nothing has changed

since then except a political calculation of what their people need to hear.

*Finally, we have been told that these European countries would only use ap mines “responsibly, and in line with IHL.”* They say that **despite all evidence from past use** in Europe or elsewhere, *they alone* will be able to use these weapons in a so-called safe and responsible manner. This is simply not possible. An indiscriminate weapon CAN NEVER be used in a way that targets only soldiers. And in the heat of a battle, it is unimaginable that soldiers will have time to carefully mark, record, and protect mined areas. Many people in this room know firsthand that mines cannot be simply picked up after a battle like garbage scattered on the ground. Demining is a costly, long, and dangerous process. Always.

We call on all States Parties – close allies of the five or not – to urge these states to stay – clearly, and with no hesitation, and we are reassured by the many messages along those lines today. But to those states that are showing a great deal of understanding for these decisions publicly or behind closed doors, we would say be very careful about setting double standards, and about opening the door to a norm erosion in many other contexts.

In closing Mme President, I want to again draw your attention to **two international joint appeals** published this week, each calling on the five states to remain in the treaty and reject this horrifying weapon.

The **first appeal** is **by 101 Nobel laureates**, including Lech Walesa from Poland and 18 other Nobel Peace Prize winners.

The **second appeal has been signed by other prominent persons**, including three former ministers from Finland.

We would also like to call your attention to a public petition by WeMove and ICBL asking the 5 countries to stay. It was signed already by **more than 80,000 individuals across Europe**, including from the 5 withdrawing states, with their **personal comments showing powerful support for the mine ban**.

This morning we handed over a copy of this petition to you Madame President, as well as to the representatives of the five countries with a sincere request to transmit this petition and these calls to their leadership. It is not too late to change your minds.

Thank you.