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Landmine conference ends with organizers citing gains

Thomas C. Fox | Dec. 10, 2012 NCR Today

Government representatives and NGO delegations have concluded their 12th international meeting [1]in the past 15 years after the Mine Ban Treaty was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada.

The meeting was highlighted with the announcement that Poland had become the 161st State Party to the treaty, making the ban on antipersonnel mines universal among European Union countries.

The United States, meanwhile, which sent an observer to the gathering, is the lone holdout among NATO countries. The US declared that it would announce its decision on whether to join the treaty, ?soon,? following a policy review that began in 2009.

Antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions are indiscriminate weapons that injure and kill civilians in every corner of the globe, every day. Placed under or on the ground, antipersonnel mines explode from the contact or presence of a person. When triggered, they kill or cause injuries like blindness, burns, destroyed limbs and shrapnel wounds.

Until the 1990s, antipersonnel landmines had been used by almost all armed forces of the world, in one form or another. Following the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty landmine use has dramatically dropped...

The presence of 17 states (not parties to the treaty) at the meeting - including China, Lao People?s Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, United States, and Vietnam ? ?reaffirmed the strength of the treaty?s norm and the priority placed by the international community on achieving a mine-free world,? according the conference organizers.

Additionally, Palestine attended the annual meeting for the first time and declared its strong desire to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty as soon as possible. With its new status at the UN, it is now eligible to join.

International Campaign to Ban Landmines [2] (ICBL) Head of Delegation, Stephen Goose, says: ?Fifteen years after the opening of the Mine Ban Treaty, we still see a high level of commitment from States Parties and a vibrant partnership of civil society, governments, international organizations and UN agencies aimed at ending for all time the scourge of landmines...?

Six States Parties declared completion of their obligation to clear all mined areas under their jurisdiction or control, including the Congo, Denmark, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan and Uganda.

There are now 23 States Parties that have complied with this obligation, including eleven in Africa, six in Europe, five in Latin America and one in the Middle East. Thirty-six States Parties are still in the process of clearing mined areas.

Hungary confirmed that it will conclude mine clearance efforts in 2013. Mozambique and Venezuela reported that they aim to complete mine clearance by 2014.

Statements by survivors also highlighted the humanitarian effects of anti-personnel landmines and the need to continue prevention and also support for victims.

Anti-landmine advocates say:

- Landmines slow repatriation of refugees and displaced people, or even prevent it altogether.
- They hamper the provision of aid and relief services and threaten, injure and kill aid workers.
- Medical treatment for landmine victims, where available, is costly, burdening an already overstretched health-care system.
- Communities are deprived of their productive land: farm land, orchards, irrigation canals and water points may be no longer accessible.
- Mines also cut off access to economically important areas, such as roads, electricity pylons and dams.

The conference organizers reported the landmine situation is better today than ten years ago, with a considerable decline in the number of new victims of anti-personnel mines noted.

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Links:
[1] http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-12-08/six-more-countries-added-to-landmine-free-list/4416536
[2] http://www.icbl.org/index.php