

**Symposium marking the 10th Anniversary of the Vienna Meeting on
the Convention for the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines**

“Assisting Landmine Survivors: A Decade of Efforts”

Opening Speech by

Austrian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Dr. Hans Winkler

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to thank you all for your presence here at the symposium marking the 10th Anniversary of the Vienna Meeting on the Convention for the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines. It was exactly TODAY ten years ago that a core group of like-minded states met in the Austrian capital to discuss the initial draft text of a Convention to Ban Anti-Personnel Mines.

This meeting from 12 -14 February 1997 was a formal follow up to the call made by the then Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy at the *International Strategy Conference: Towards a Global Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines* in Ottawa in 1996 - the very conference that provided the name to the Ottawa Process. I remember personally that in the beginning not everybody believed in its success. This process turned out to be one of the most successful ones in international disarmament not least due to its humanitarian implications. Despite major concerns expressed by a number of states Llyod Axworthy had decided in 1996 to demand

the negotiation and signature of a Treaty to Ban Anti-Personnel Mines by the end of 1997.

I would like to recall that on the political level it was the commitment of the then Foreign Minister Schüssel and then State Secretary Benita Ferrero-Waldner that initiated the Process in Austria. In October 1996, the Austrian delegation to the Ottawa Conference already had a first draft of an Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention with them. This draft was circulated in November the same year and discussed at the expert meeting which was held in Vienna exactly 10 years ago. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Thomas Hajnoczi - who I also welcome among us today - and provided states with an initial opportunity to comment directly on the first draft of the Convention. Austria had expected 90 governments to attend, and in fact the long narrow room where the meeting was held was packed with 111 government representatives and many NGOs.

Several draft versions followed the initial one with the input of NGOs and governments which were working almost on a daily basis with the members of the core group. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its leader Jody Williams won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for their decisive efforts in connection with the Convention. The Treaty was finally signed in Ottawa in December 1997 and entered into force in March 1999.

Why was and is the Ottawa Convention such a success? Why does the Ottawa process after a decade of efforts still serve as a model

for various other disarmament endeavors? Why do people still refer to “*the spirit of Ottawa*” today?

Various reasons spring to mind and perhaps these questions can be answered best by referring to the “five famous journalistic Ws” of WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY. The success of the Ottawa Convention was a result of a combination of

- **WHO: the people from governments and NGOs involved in the multilateral cooperation, their individual personalities and dedicated commitment;**
- **WHAT: negotiations conducted with a cooperative spirit and for a common cause;**
- **WHEN: the proper timing, the right momentum;**
- **WHERE: the good choice of geographical patronage and**
- **WHY: most importantly, the strive for a right cause and the willingness of governments as our own to support this cause politically.**

Today we count 152 states which have ratified the Convention including the majority of those states that are most heavily affected by landmines, such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We can indeed celebrate considerable progress. The Convention has established an international standard which is also respected by the majority of those states that have not yet joined this important humanitarian instrument.

The use of Anti-Personnel Mines has been markedly reduced in recent years, fewer mines are being produced and trade with this hazardous weapon has almost completely ceased.

In addition, the States Parties to the Convention have destroyed stockpiled Anti-Personnel Mines and cleared vast tracks of mined land. And fortunately, the annual number of new mine victims is now significantly lower than it used to be and many landmine survivors are now receiving better care and assistance. But there is no reason to be satisfied or complacent - much more must be done

The Convention's preamble records the wish of the States Parties *"to do their utmost in providing assistance for the care and rehabilitation, including the social and economic reintegration of mine victims."* The Convention is a significant success in that it addresses for the first time in a legally binding international treaty the aspirations of mine victims in particular and persons with disability in general.

Victims are not only those people that survive a landmine blast, but also all those in the wider circle of a family, a community and a society who are indirectly harmed by the repercussions of landmine incidents. Therefore, victim assistance refers to aid, relief, comfort and support provided to all victims with the purpose of reducing the immediate and long-term medical and psychological implications of their trauma.

Victim assistance is an integral component of mine action and always rests in the broader contexts of national health care and

rehabilitation programmes, human rights and development. Austria, together with Sudan, is honoured to be the current Co-chair of the Convention's Standing Committee on Victim Assistance. In this capacity, we support an ambitious programme to counter remaining challenges of victim assistance. Victims are what we are here for today.

Our symposium entitled "*Assisting Landmine Survivors: A Decade of Efforts*" is dedicated to all concerns and dimensions of victim assistance. The event will feature panel presentations on key aspects of victim assistance and should provide the audience with an overview of ten years of hard work and the great challenges that still lie ahead.

I would like to thank all those personalities of the Ottawa Convention who shaped the decade of efforts, particularly those who continuously contributed to assisting landmine victims, those who are the faces and spirits carrying the Ottawa Process forward successfully, and last but not least those who made this event possible today.

We should take that as a commitment not to rest our ambitions. We must continue working for a further development of humanitarian law in order to reduce the suffering where we can. This, Ladies and Gentleman, is a noble cause where governments, NGOs and the international community at large must join forces. Together we are strong.

Thank you very much.