

**16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel
Mine Ban Convention.**

**Panel: *Keeping People at the Heart
of the Convention:***

Effective Victim Assistance

Tuesday, 19 December 2017

**Opening remarks by
H.R.H. Princess Astrid of Belgium**

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, /
Let me start /
by expressing my gratitude / to Austria /
for **its** hospitality /
and for hosting /
the **16th** Meeting of the States Parties /
to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention /
here / in Vienna. /
This event/ confirms/ once more/
the continued **Austrian** commitment/
to our common objectives/
of a world/ free of mines/ by 2025//.

2017 marks/the 20th anniversary/
of the signature/of the Ottawa Convention/

On this festive occasion/ I am very pleased/
to be with you today/.

I recognize/ so many familiar faces. /

We are all members/
of the « Ottawa Convention family »/
as you rightly mentioned,/ Mr Chairman,/

in your kind invitation./

Ladies and Gentlemen, /
At this anniversary, /I would like to convey/
- a special message/of respect and encouragement /
to the survivors, /to the victims,/ to their families/
and/ to the victims' representatives/
for their essential role/and continued efforts./
- Let me congratulate also/ all the NGO's,/
the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, /
the ICRC,/ and/ the civil society/
for their persistent commitment/
during these 20 years of a campaign/
which led to a Nobel Peace Prize!/

- A special word of gratitude/ to Prince Mired of Jordan/ for His generous devotion/ and contributions/ to the Convention./
- Our courageous deminers equally/ deserve a special place/ in the collective memory/ of our Ottawa Family,/ with deepest respect/ for their patience/ and perilous devotion./

Ladies and Gentlemen,/

Together,/ we are proud to celebrate/
the **achievements** of the Ottawa Convention,/

and/ specially today/
with the **announcement**/made by **Sri Lanka**,/
to join us,/ as number 163./

This is indeed/a **wonderful birthday present!**/

Many countries/ have destroyed/
their stocks of antipersonnel mines./
States/ have finalized their clearance obligations, /
returning cities/ and villages/ to their inhabitants,/
guaranteeing access/
to drinking water,/ lands,/ schools/ and hospitals./

Nevertheless, / there is no time for complacency, /
we shouldn't rest on our laurels./
We must keep promoting/
formal adherence to the Convention/
in order to strive/for its universalization./

Even today, / these mines, / **especially**/
the scourge of improvised anti-personnel mines,/ /
continue to kill/ or injure/ people,/ /
mostly civilians,/ among them/ many children./
A lot has been achieved, / but/ much needs to be
done./ The clearance/ of landmine contamination/
and/ the destruction of stockpiles/
are still/ persistent challenges/ in many States Parties./
Cooperation and assistance/ between both/
donor and affected States/ remain/ vital,/ /
to be 'stronger together'./

Ladies and Gentlemen, /
Victim assistance/ is part of the Convention, /
with an obligation/ to address the needs/
of survivors,/ their families/ and communities,/ /
affected by landmines./
As **your** Special Envoy/ to the Ottawa Convention,/ /
I am honored/ to open this panel/ entitled: /
“Keeping People/ **at the Heart** of the Convention:/ /
Effective Victim Assistance”./

Victim assistance/ is indeed/
a priority of the Convention./

The Austrian Presidency/has rightly decided/
to organize/ this interactive panel/
to raise/awareness on this relevant topic./
- Indeed/ at the 3rd Review Conference/ in Maputo,/
State Parties/ reiterated/ their commitment/
to **the full,/ equal and effective participation/**
of mine victims to society./
- The Maputo Action Plan/ recommends/
that/ **victim assistance/ should be integrated/**
into broader national policies/ related/
to the rights of persons/ with disabilities/

in the sector of health,/ social welfare,/ education,/ employment,/ development/ and/poverty reduction./

- And State Parties/are also invited/

to embed victim assistance/

in a broader human rights/ and disability context,/

to address the needs/

and guarantee/the rights of mine victims/

in an age- and gender-sensitive manner./

- Actually/ States /are engaged **to empower/**

those who are injured/ by landmines,/ so that/

they **become actors/ of their own development./**

Ladies and Gentlemen,/

I really hope/ that this panel/ will contribute
effectively/ to keeping victim assistance/
at the heart/ of the Convention. /

We all know, / that **our** Ottawa Convention Family,/
really/ has a heart. /

That's why/ I feel so blessed/ to be **your** Special
Envoy:/

This is diplomacy with a heart./

The Ottawa Convention/is one/
of the very few grand diplomatic achievements/
of our times,/br/>with universal appeal,/br/>with concrete measurable results/
within the lifespan of one generation./br/>It's just/ like Jody Williams said,/and I quote her/
*"Together/ we have given the world/
the possibility/ of one day living/
on a truly mine-free planet."/*

- Our reward/ is the smile of safe families,/ living on mine-free lands. /

- Our strength and determination/ are inspired/ by the courageous testimonies/ of surviving land mine victims, / as they are speaking to the world/ as talented representatives/ of many thousands anonymous victims./

- The Ottawa Family/ should /and will remain/ an inspiration/ for a better future./

In this spirit,/ I open this panel/ and I wish you/

a very fruitful exchange of views.//