

**STATEMENT BY HER ROYAL HIGHNESS
PRINCESS ASTRID OF BELGIUM
TO THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES
OF THE MINE BAN CONVENTION
BANGKOK 15 SEPTEMBER 2003**

(check against delivery !)

Your Royal Highness,
Your Excellency,
Excellencies,
Mister President,
Distinguished audience,

Let me first of all congratulate and thank the Kingdom of Thailand for organising this very important 5th Meeting of the States Parties of the Mine Ban Convention. In doing so, Thailand has accepted to play a leading role in the promotion of the Convention as well as in the preparation of the First Review Conference of the Convention.

Today it is the third opportunity for me to address this distinguished audience. The previous occasion was one year ago in Geneva, at the beginning of the Chairmanship of Belgium, which takes an end now.

This hand over to a new chairman gives me the opportunity to share with you some experiences of the past and to formulate a few suggestions for the future.

Generally speaking, it is heart-warming to see evidence of success and of progress on all aspects of the Mine Ban Convention year after year. And it is also encouraging to note the ongoing power of the Convention, which is promising for its continuing effectiveness.

This Convention might perhaps become a model for a successful approach of multilateral diplomacy to other types of international arrangements.

But allow me to especially highlight four key points, which were very relevant during the past 12 months and to illustrate them with some facts and figures. They are the increasing universal character of the Convention, its growing implementation, victim assistance and resource mobilization.

So, my first point is the growing universal character of the Convention.

The Mine Ban Convention has the vocation to become a universally accepted legally binding instrument. Today, four and a half years after its entry into force, more than two thirds of the states of the world have subscribed to the Convention. Progress towards universalization continues, slowly but without halting.

So, since September 2002 we were pleased to welcome 8 new member states. With a total of 136 Member States and with at least a dozen other States on their way to accession, the Convention has become a solid rock in our common fight against anti-personnel mines.

We should continue our efforts to promote universal adherence. Every new accession is important. Because it contributes to the expectations of those who are already States Parties.

But also because every new member in our Group of States Parties constitutes one more move towards our common goal, namely a world free of anti-personnel mines.

In this context it is relevant to note that some States which are not, or not yet member of the Mine Ban Convention, have nevertheless accepted in their policy the concept of a total prohibition of anti-personnel mines. Some of them have even slowed down or stopped their production of anti-personnel mines, or have reduced the trade of them. It really pleases us to see this mentality change.

But on the other hand and sadly enough, a considerable number of States still remain outside the Convention. They should receive from us the clear message that there is no conceivable utility of anti-personnel mines that could outweigh and justify the devastating humanitarian costs of these weapons.

Secondly I would like to stress now the achievements in the implementation of the Convention

Membership for the sake of membership alone, something I would call "*quantitative universality*", is simply not enough, especially when human lives and human suffering are at stake.

What we need here is "*qualitative universality*", which means full implementation as an expression of the depth of our involvement.

In this context, mine clearance and stockpile destruction are key features.

Since the entry into force of the Mine Ban Convention vast areas of land have been cleared of anti-personnel mines. A year ago around 26 million anti-personnel mines were destroyed. Today some 60 States Parties can jointly announce that they have destroyed more than 30 million anti-personnel mines. That means that in twelve months time there was the elimination of 4 million potential sources of human suffering. Concretely, it also means that every day we obtain more than 10.000 victories in our common fight against our enemy, the antipersonnel mines.

On the 1st of March 2003, not less than 45 States Parties were required to comply with their deadline for stockpile destruction. This was a huge credibility test for the Convention and its supporters. They stood the test in an outstanding way. All of the 45 have indicated that they no longer possess stockpiles.

Moreover, during the 12 last months, there are no flagrant cases of States Parties having used, produced, transferred or stockpiled anti-personnel mines.

These impressive achievements are the result of the relentless work of many people – both in meeting rooms and in the field. They should be warmly commended for it. And I suggest to cheer them.

Despite these wonderful achievements, our work is not finished yet. Therefore we should continue to give attention to a number of actions, which have decisively contributed to these results.

- One of them is the annual reporting under article 7. It is a real tool for transparency, an important source of information, a clear indicator of cooperation and compliance and *lastly* a good reference for assessment of progress.
- A second one is the necessary further mobilization of resources as expression of a collective commitment to eliminate anti-personnel mines.
- And finally, a third one is the promotion, whenever possible, of regional initiatives.

These initiatives do not only allow to give greater attention to certain regions or sub-regions. They also have the effect to get closer to the local problems and the concrete needs of the population.

My third point is “Victim Assistance”, which is in my view the most crucial one.

In my capacity as National President of the Belgian Red Cross, I can confirm that our society attaches particular importance to all efforts made in the assistance of the victims in general and especially in the assistance of the victims of antipersonnel mines.

The negotiators of the Convention have drafted in the first preambular paragraph the objective of the Convention, which is: to put an end to the human, social and economic impact of anti-personnel mines. This skillfully written paragraph still deserves our fullest attention today.

It is a fact that since its entry into force, the level of victims has fallen, thanks to your remarkable efforts, as mentioned before.

Despite these efforts, the registered number of new victims during the last year is still around 8.000. And more than 80 % of them are civilians, often women and children.

The real casualty rate is likely to be between 15.000 and 20.000.

These are new victims, adding up to those who are already faced with lifelong suffering, physically, socially, and economically.

Fortunately, many States Parties, international organizations and NGO's involved in victim assistance or in mine risk education have in the meantime accumulated considerable expertise. It has allowed them to contribute to the resolution of a large scale of problems that victims of landmines are faced with.

It is still not enough. The technical capacity and the necessary resources to respond to victim's needs are still insufficiently available or accessible in mine-affected countries. Emergency treatment and hospital care, as well as functional rehabilitation, long term psychological support and socio-economic integration are vital components of a successful mine victim assistance. States Parties should take this situation into account when deciding on public health priorities.

Distinguished audience, all mine victims are of course equally important. But allow me, as a mother of five children to have a special thought for the fate of child victims of armed conflicts.

At the World Summit for the children in 1990 the international community renewed its solemn commitment to the protection of children caught in conflict areas.

In this respect, I would like to quote the final remarks delivered by my uncle, the late King Baudouin, in his statement on the 29th of September 1990 in New York, to the Heads of State participating at the World Summit: *“In case of war, there will also be hundreds of thousands of children among the first innocent victims. Let us not forget this. Let us not forget them.”*

Alleviating the suffering of children in battle areas is so important that an Optional Protocol devoted to this issue was adopted in May 2000 and entered into force in February 2002.

I am firmly convinced that also in the context of the Mine Ban Convention we have the duty to do our part and to live up to our promises made to the children worldwide. This perspective should motivate to fight even harder for the complete achievement of the goals of the Convention.

This brings me almost automatically to my last consideration, namely: “resource mobilization”.

The Mine Ban Convention, even if it can benefit from a growing universal support, a deepening implementation, programs for lifelong victim assistance, generous dedication of many people, it will not be able to function properly without the necessary financial resources.

In 2002, mine action funding has reached the level of 300 million dollar, which is an increase of 30% from the previous year. This is not a small success in a world where resources must be accounted for, where there is competition between growing demands and available means.

But despite these increased mine action donations, the size of the challenges ahead indicates that the current levels of funding do not allow to fulfil all requirements.

Therefore we need to explore all realistic ways to mobilize the necessary resources to achieve our aims.

All States Parties, traditional donors as well as mine-affected countries, should be encouraged to provide domestic resources.

Distinguished Audience ,

After concluding my remarks on these four key points which I wanted to share with you, I

want to point out that at the end of next year another important meeting is scheduled, namely: the First Review Conference of the States Parties.

At that occasion, States Parties will have the unique opportunity to reaffirm their commitments to the Convention.

But it is also an important challenge because the next major deadline under the Convention comes in 2009 - only 6 years away from now – when many States Parties are supposed to have cleared all the mine fields on their territory.

Undertaking the necessary actions to meet this deadline will be an immense task for many of the States Parties. The main responsibility to implement these obligations certainly rests with the mine-affected countries. But a sustained effort by all States Parties will also be needed.

Cooperation and exchange of information on problems related to mined areas and their humanitarian impact, on concrete plans to clear mined areas, on progress made in order to meet the deadlines of the Mine Ban Convention, as well as on priorities for assistance will be of the utmost importance.

Your Royal Highness ,
Your Excellency,
Excellencies,
Mister President,
Distinguished audience,

My country was the first country to adopt national legislation that fully outlawed anti-personnel mines, including components and technology.

Today, Belgium has the intention to continue to play an active role in the promotion of the universalisation and the implementation of the Mine Ban Convention. In its Declaration to the Parliament in July of this year, the new Belgian Federal Government has reaffirmed its continued political support for the fight against anti-personnel mines.

And I quote: “ The Belgian Government will conduct an active policy for peace...The Government will continue to strive for a worldwide ban on antipersonnel mines.”

I really hope that all participants in this 5th Meeting of States Parties can join us in this approach. So I wish you all a very productive Meeting and I wish in particular a successful year to the incoming Chair.

Thank you very much.