

Statement by  
H.E. Dr. Sorajak Kasemsuvan  
Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand  
at the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention  
at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok  
on 15 September 2003

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Thai delegation, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention. I am confident that under your able guidance and exemplary leadership, the Meeting will be steered toward fruitful results.

Allow me to thank and welcome the message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as delivered by Mr. Kim Hak Su, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The same felicitations also go to Professor Daniel Thurer, Member of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for the statement delivered on behalf of the President of the ICRC, and to Ms. Jody Williams, President of the International Campaign on the Ban of Landmines and 1997 Noble Peace Prize Co-Laureate, for her statement earlier this afternoon.

I should like to express my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Jean Lint of Belgium, President of the Fourth Meeting of the States Parties, for his untiring efforts leading to the progress of the Convention in the past year. I also wish to congratulate and welcome the new States Parties that have recently acceded to the Mine Ban Convention namely Belarus, Central African Republic, Cyprus, Gambia, Guyana, Lithuania, Sao Tome and Principe, and

Timor-Leste. Such development clearly represents a step in the right direction towards ridding the world of landmines.

Mr. President,

It goes without saying that the problem of landmines constitutes as great a threat to humanity as that of weapons of mass destruction, especially when one considers the magnitude of the problem and the actual impact being felt by a great number of people throughout the world. Landmines are dormant killers, choosing to claim their victims indiscriminately of time, age, gender, race and nationality. Their victims, if lucky enough to be alive, have to endure not only physical suffering, but also grave psychological as well as socio-economic consequences.

Since the entry into force of the Mine Ban Convention in 1999, heralded as a new chapter of cooperation, there has been considerable achievement in terms stockpile destruction, mine clearance, victim assistance, social reintegration, and mine risk education. Yet this is only a beginning of a long journey. The recent estimate of the number of new landmine casualties, between 15,000-20,000 per year, indicates that there is much more to be done.

For our part, Thailand is determined to tackle the landmine problems vigorously. But we are conscious that we cannot do it alone. Landmines pose a common threat to our collective security, which warrants collective responsibility and action, both regionally and internationally. We are of the view that the very strength of the global regime on landmine ban lies in the recognition that the core objectives of the Mine Ban Convention are so intertwined with the concept of human security. Landmine problems in mine-affected developing countries entail multi-faceted dimensions, be they security, development, economic, and social. Various mine action tasks are aimed at restoring a sense of

security so that landmine survivors can live in dignity and reemerge as active members of the society.

The existence of landmines creates an environment of fear among people living in the vicinity of mine-affected areas and inhibits them from fulfilling their basic needs. Children, in particular, have increasingly been vulnerable to the danger of landmines, as their curiosity often leads to hapless and untimely fatality. The ultimate humanitarian goal, as envisaged in the Convention, is to empower the affected people to attain the freedom from fear and freedom from want, or, in short, human security. But landmines are only the symptoms of insecurity. Until and unless we address their root causes, namely armed conflicts and terrorism, we cannot halt the vicious cycle of demining and remining of the mine-affected fields. But together we will and we must!

Mr. President,

On our part, Thailand is wholeheartedly committed to implementing the Mine Ban Convention so as to eradicate landmines and its adverse humanitarian ramifications. In compliance with our treaty obligations, Thailand has completely destroyed her stockpile of antipersonnel landmines on 24 April 2003. However, a total of 4,970 landmines is retained for training and research purposes, as permitted by Article 3 of the Convention. Thailand's mine-affected areas total 2,556.7 square kilometers, covering 27 out of the 76 of our provinces. Although strenuous efforts are being made with regard to mine clearance, to date, despite all efforts, Thailand Mine Action Center or TMAC has managed to clear only the total of 0.03 percent of the area. Clearly, a great deal more of technical assistance in addressing the daunting task is needed in making the disappearance of all the landmines and making the country a mine-free land a reality.

In addition, adequate assistance in rehabilitating and reintegrating mine victims into society is also the key variable in realizing the humanitarian objectives of the Convention. Fully aware of the intricate links between national development and problems of landmines, Thailand has attached great importance to the relations between landmine elimination and creating a strong foundation for human security. Thailand has made such assistance part and parcel of the country's overall public health and social services policy. The landmine issue is included in Our Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) under the national security promotion section. The Thai Government is processing a national comprehensive plan to assist mine survivors with the hope that it will be in operation soon.

Closer to home, it is precisely the persistence of mine affected lands that hinders the prospects for development at sub-regional level. This is particularly affecting the cooperation efforts aimed at bringing more rapid development to Thailand's immediate neighbours. Landmines are hindrances to the transportation linkages and tourism, the promotion of trans-boundary trade and investments, as well as the enhancement of people-to-people contact under such frameworks as the "Greater Mekong Subregion Program" or GMS and the recently-launched Economic Cooperation Strategy of ECS between Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia, and the tourism cooperation between Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, called the "Emerald Triangle Cooperation."

Mr. President,

Another major challenge in realizing the goal of a world free of land-mines lies in the universalization of the Mine Ban Convention. While, today, more countries have acceded to the treaty, concerted efforts should be continued to persuade those not yet party to the Convention to come on board. At this juncture, I

wish to express our sincere thanks to Canada for its pivotal role in coordinating the Universalization Contact Group, which has continued to produce positive results.

Thailand believes that the most practical approach to achieve universalization of the Convention is a step-by-step basis. Starting from coordination on mine-related activities at the regional level, this could later evolve into greater participation at the global level. The same vigor and resolve that bind all countries in Southeast Asia together in support of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ) may be emulated in the attempt to ban landmines in the region.

In the past years, a series of regional seminars has been organized in Thailand with the aim of raising mine awareness as well as engaging Asian countries in solving landmine problems in the region. These activities helped cultivate a constructive dialogue among non-States Parties in the region, some of which have already undertaken measures that are in line with the Convention on a voluntary basis. This is why Thailand particularly welcomes China's acceptance to participate in the Fifth Meeting as an observer.

As a member of the 13 states Human Security Network or HSN, Thailand has been consistent in promoting the spirit and intent of the Mine Ban Convention under its framework. At the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of HSN in Graz, Austria, in May this year, it was agreed that the Network would continue its advocacy for the universalization and full implementation of the Convention. As the only HSN member in this part of Asia and hosting the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties here in Bangkok, Thailand will support the HSN joint statement on the Mine Ban Convention, which will be issued during the course of the Meeting.

Mr. President,

The path toward the full implementation and universalization of the Mine Ban Convention can only be successful if it is backed up with a strong political will and adequate resource mobilization. My delegation would like to emphasize that a partnership between mine-affected countries and more advanced countries be urgently forged in order to deal with this issue. Many States Parties attach a high priority to the completion of mine clearance within the year 2009 as set out in the Convention. Without sufficient assistance in such areas as mine clearance & GIS technologies, R & D, and financial facility, it would seem worrying that most mine-affected developing countries may fall short of expectation. Accordingly, I would like to thank Norway for its leading role as coordinator of Resource Mobilization Contact Group, which has made great stride in this regard.

In addition, a constructive partnership with all sectors of the society should also be initiated. The uniqueness of the Mine Ban Convention is attributed to the unprecedented level of synergy between national governments and international civil societies, especially in the pursuit of humanitarian objectives of the Convention. Participation on the part of the media and the academia should also be encouraged to mobilize a wider public support on the landmine issue, while the private sector could also be engaged in complementing the governments' efforts in various mine action activities.

Mr. President,

I wish to reiterate that solving the landmine problems requires a firm commitment of the international community. But the challenge in realizing this colossal task is to ensure that we do not lose sight on the importance of strengthening human security.

In order to achieve the desired level of security and well-being of mine-affected people:

- We must enhance regional processes in all parts of the world so as to universalize the acceptance of the Mine Ban Convention and its norms;

- We must build the momentum upon that acceptance and work in partnership with all the stakeholders toward the full and effective implementation; and

- We must join hands and work closely together so that the goal of freeing the world of anti-personnel landmines will be within our reach.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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