



**"The Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines:
Asia's Opportunities and Challenges"**

Address by Special Envoy HRH Prince Mired Raad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan

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Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute

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Dr. Panditaratne,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I start I would like to pass on to you the best wishes and greetings of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and that of the people of Jordan.

This is my first time to Sri Lanka but definitely not my last. I hope to come back again soon to see more of your beautiful country.

I thank you Dr. Panditaratne and the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for this gracious invitation.

It is an honour and a privilege to address you this evening on a subject that is near and dear to my heart: the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which many of you have heard it called as the Ottawa Convention, or the Mine Ban Treaty.

I have come to Colombo first and foremost to congratulate Sri Lanka for its courageous and rightful decision. It has decided that the humanitarian consequences caused by anti-personnel mines outweigh any marginal military utility these weapons may have. I congratulate Sri Lanka from the bottom of my heart.

I welcome Sri Lanka to our "family of States Parties" wholeheartedly!

What brings me here before you tonight however, goes beyond congratulating Sri Lanka. I am here to address the subject of Asia's opportunities and challenges, or better said, Sri Lanka's role in this regard.

As many of you are probably aware, the Convention is one of the most widely accepted disarmament and humanitarian treaties in the world.

To date, 164 States Parties have made the decision to never, under any circumstances, use, stockpile, produce and transfer anti-personnel mines, destroy these weapons, and assist the victims of this unjust instrument of war.

Having been born from what was at the time an unprecedented partnership between civil society and governments, the Convention entered into force in March 1999. Last week the Convention celebrated its 19th anniversary.

This historical movement of conscience against a weapon that violates key principles of international law due to its indiscriminate nature, was a combination of the will of hundreds of non-governmental and international organisations and concerned States the world over that came together to protect lives and limbs.

If last week we celebrated 19 years since entry into force... in December 2017 we celebrated 20 years since the Convention was adopted.

Twenty years ago, in 1997, the civil society movement that drove efforts that resulted in the adoption of the Convention was recognized as an important peace-making actor and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Convention that Sri Lanka has joined... is historic!

The Convention signifies the birth of what we now call humanitarian disarmament; a disarmament treaty that aims to end the suffering and casualties caused by this weapon.

So what made of this Convention, of which Sri Lanka became its 163rd party, the fastest adopted disarmament treaty?

One crucial element was the inclusion of support to victims of this weapon in the text of the Convention. Something unheard of prior to the adoption of this instrument and viewed today as "common sense" in the development of new disarmament treaties.

This convention is truly a trailblazer.

If you wonder why this Convention, which Sri Lanka is now part of, is a trail blazer, let me cite a few examples.

The stigma placed on the use of these weapons is such, that the majority of States not party implement key provisions of the Convention and many have put moratoria in place on their use, production and transfer. The United States for example, has indicated it was pursuing measures that would allow it to accede to the Convention.

The use of these weapons draws such stark condemnation that is rarely used by state forces.

Efforts put forth by States Parties to the Convention have led to the destruction of more than 51 million anti-personnel mines. These landmines will never be used again!

Of 162 States Parties with current stockpiling destruction obligations, only three remain in the process of destroying their stockpiled anti-personnel mines. This is true success.

Millions of square meters of land that were once contaminated by landmines have now been cleared to allow people to live in safety without the risk of dying or being maimed.

Notwithstanding this progress, challenges certainly remain in the implementation of this landmark instrument.

The number of new victims which was steadily decreasing for nearly two decades has climbed again. In spite of this worrying trend, thanks to the work undertaken by the Convention we understand better than ever the importance of ensuring that our victim assistance efforts be firmly anchored in sustainable broader national policies, plans and legal frameworks related to the rights of persons with disability. This includes better health, education, employment, development and poverty reduction measures.

Another important challenge that remains is that 33 States have not yet joined. A significant number of those are here in Asia.

And it is here that Sri Lanka could help make a difference.

With its accession, Sri Lanka has come to occupy its place among States Parties and could help drive international efforts to foster this norm in the region. While Sri Lanka is not the sole State in South Asia to have acceded to the Convention, it stands proudly amongst the few. There is something very noble about standing with the few.

It also puts Sri Lanka in a position of great responsibility.

In addition to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives are members of the Convention; however, India, Nepal and Pakistan remain on the sidelines.

Sri Lanka --- a mine-affected country that has come to see the effects of landmines --- has manifested its vigorous desire to do the right thing for its development and its people by joining this treaty. It now has the opportunity to take a leadership role on this matter in Asia.

Sri Lanka can be a leader on the landmine issue for various reasons.

First, thanks to its political savviness. By acceding, Sri Lanka is demonstrating that adopting the Convention does not go counter to a state's national security needs.

Secondly, for the manner in which Sri Lanka is implementing its mine clearance commitments: with a clear strategy and the necessary national ownership to see it through.

Thirdly, because by joining Sri Lanka understands that Cooperation and Assistance is more than "just a nice sentence in the text of the Convention." Sri Lanka does not stand alone in its implementation of the Convention but joins a family of States Parties that support joint efforts to meet the ambition of a world free of anti-personnel mines. With its accession, Sri Lanka is positioned to receive technical and financial assistance from those members of the Convention that want to see Sri Lanka succeed in achieving its goals, and meeting its Convention obligations.

Lastly, but not least, Sri Lanka's moral and technical leadership can be a catalyst for other states in the region that remain outside the treaty to take steps towards accession. We have called the Honourable President of Sri Lanka and on the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka to continue their commitment to

the Convention by promoting this humanitarian instrument and in particular its norms, in the region, namely with Nepal which is already complying with a number of provisions under the Convention, particularly, mine clearance.

And so THESE are Sri Lanka's opportunities for leadership in the Convention in Asia.

In this role, Sri Lanka is not alone either.

This year, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention is being chaired by Afghanistan, and we all understand the difficult situation that Afghanistan faces with armed non-state actors.

Afghanistan and other States Parties face security challenges in the implementation of the Convention and proliferation of improvised anti-personnel landmines.

But this has not deterred Afghanistan. It remains steadfast in its resolve to address landmine contamination and has vowed that under its Presidency, it will continue its mine clearance efforts and the promotion of the Convention in various fora including the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

It is the view of the Convention, that promoting the treaty at this time of its history is the right approach. Countries, **as States Parties to both, the Convention and the SAARC**, can maintain this issue on the international radar.

We count on Sri Lanka on doing its part in promoting this noble instrument in the region.

In my invitation to speak to you today, I was asked to draw on Jordan's experience in the Convention, and in particular, to speak about fulfilling the Convention's promise to landmine victims and survivors through wider national disability efforts.

This is also part of the challenges we face – and here we can draw some parallels to the situation that Sri Lanka faces, to that of other States Parties.

As a State Party, Sri Lanka will soon have to report to the Convention on any victim assistance efforts it undertakes on behalf of landmine victims and survivors.

Sri Lanka should not think of this as an onerous obligation. Sri Lanka is ALREADY carrying out efforts to address the needs of persons of disabilities, including landmine survivors who have acquired a disability, through obligations acquired under another instrument: the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), of which Sri Lanka is also a State Party.

Being party to both these Conventions will largely enable Sri Lanka to benefit from new synergies to integrate efforts to meet both Convention obligations. Implementing obligations under both conventions can only result in gains for Sri Lanka.

This is a golden opportunity for Sri Lanka to advance on its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to health and well-being, and gender.

In this regard, the Convention also stipulates that “each State Party in a position to do so shall provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration, of mine victims and for mine awareness programs [...], for mine clearance and related activities, [...] and for the destruction of stockpiled antipersonnel mines.” In this respect, the Convention provides greater emphasis on those States that are party to the Convention.

One such example is the support provided by the European Union through a Council Decision envisaged to assist 10 States Parties to implement key decisions such as mine clearance and victim assistance through sponsoring National Stakeholder Dialogues, and also to promote this instrument and its norm among those States that have not yet joined. Sri Lanka is in a position to benefit of such assistance as other States Parties. The fact that I am speaking to you here today is thanks, in no small part, to such Decision by the EU Council, to promote the norms of the Convention in regions where adherence is low.

I am here in Sri Lanka accompanied by the Director of the Convention’s Implementation Support Unit (ISU) which is tasked with assisting Sri Lanka and the other 163 States Parties to understand their obligations under the convention, including obtaining a better understanding of the tools and resources available. The ISU stands ready to support an advise Sri Lanka as the Convention enters into force.

As for my country, Jordan, we are tackling the issue of Victim Assistance on several fronts. We are trying our best to address the direct needs of our landmine and other ERW [explosive remnants of war] survivors on the one hand, and at the same time we are working diligently to promote the rights of people with disabilities in Jordan more broadly.

Last year we legislated a new law, Law number 20 for ‘The Rights of Persons with Disabilities.’ This law is the most progressive and human rights-based law in our Middle East region. The articles in the law are cross-cutting and place obligations on most of the government ministries, vis-a-vis education, health, diagnostic testing, accessibility, voting, employment, deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities and their integration and inclusion into society, etcetera. This is how we are dealing with the issue in Jordan and it is my utmost honour to be leading the charge on it.

Dear friends,

The solidarity shown by Sri Lanka by joining the Convention and its serious approach to dealing with contamination is a demonstration of its leadership in disarmament in the region.

I take the opportunity to recognize the hard work and labour of the Sri Lanka Campaign to Ban Landmines for calling Sri Lanka to join the Convention, and especially to Vidya Abhayagunawardena, who has been a relentless campaigner for the landmine cause for many years.

I am humbled and profoundly honoured that I have been given the opportunity to come to Sri Lanka to see first-hand the commitment to mine clearance and the efforts you are undertaking to meet the Convention’s obligations. I wish you all the very best in your future endeavours on the landmine issue and want you to know that we are together in the same boat and paddling in the same direction.

God Bless you All and God Bless the beautiful country of Sri Lanka.