

ICBL Opening Remarks by Margaret Arach Orech, ICBL Ambassador

20th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty, 21-25 November 2022

Distinguished Delegates, Dear Friends,

The Mine Ban Treaty has reached yet another milestone. It has been 25 years since this treaty was adopted with jubilation, thanks to the unprecedented partnership between States, the ICRC, Civil Society and the UN, united under the sole aim “*to put an end to the suffering and casualties caused by antipersonnel mines.*”

Anniversaries are to celebrate the past, but more importantly to reflect on the present, on how far we have come and to look into future to see how long we still have to go.

Now, reflecting on where we are today, 25 years on - no doubt we have come a long way: More than 80% of the world’s countries have come on board of the treaty; large tracts of contaminated land in communities around the world have been freed of landmines; dozens of millions of landmine stockpiles destroyed; and most importantly, many potentially lost lives and limbs saved.

But can we truly celebrate, when we still see thousands of new victims of landmines year after year, with many of them being children? When landmines, both manufactured and improvised, are still being used today in new and old conflicts, causing havoc in the lives of the people the treaty is meant to protect? When there are still countries that cling to their stocks which could be used one day? When so many communities in so many countries continue to live with this daily threat? Whole generations don’t remember anything else but life among landmines. And so many victims in so many places around the world still are begging to receive basic assistance.

25 years on, still some 60 countries, more than half of them States Parties to this treaty, are contaminated by landmines. 25 years on, many affected people and communities are still waiting for the fulfillment of the treaty's promise of a mine-free field, village, country – a mine-free world.

When will they, when will we see it? How many more years will it take us?

Twenty-two years ago, when I first became involved with the Campaign to Ban Landmines, shortly after losing my leg to a landmine in my country Uganda, I remember the energy and excitement of the mine ban community in those days. Everyone treated landmines as a life-and-death matter and wanted to contribute to putting an end to this weapon. We all believed that with this energy and commitment, we will get the world rid of landmines in no time. I recall the plenary rooms those days would be filled to their capacity with well-dressed ladies and gentlemen, with a noticeable number in military attire, mingling and discussing with survivors and NGOs in the corridors. The plenary discussions were especially lively during the deliberations on mine clearance, stockpile destruction, risk education and international cooperation, and considerably less so during victim assistance, when the room would go almost silent, with only the ICBL, the ICRC and other international agencies taking the floor. Sadly, this has not changed much over the years.

I remember the excitement and hope around the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World - the First Review Conference. And then the 2nd Review Conference in Cartagena where ICBL had a fun slogan: “A Mine-Free World – Mission Possible!”, and where we called for finishing the job in years, not decades, and when I think the US for the first time showed up at a treaty meeting. Well, it is now time to move to the seats among the States Parties (and help others to move there too!).

Around the 3rd Review Conference in 2014 in Maputo there was renewed hope, as we saw the casualty numbers dropping to record low, Mozambique becoming mine-free, and States adopting the aspirational goal of completion by 2025. At the last Review Conference in Oslo, we actually hit two decades of implementation and by then it had already become clear that we still had a long way ahead. Today, this aspirational goal of 2025 seems to be out of reach, with questions raised whether we will indeed see a world free of mines if we continue as we have...

Most of it is up to us, up to States Parties, and we need to act now with full determination and courage to bring the treaty back on course for a Mine Free World, without delay.

Therefore, on behalf of all landmine victims and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, I am appealing to all states and partners to find new courage, new energy, new solutions, and more resources to:

- Approach the implementation of the treaty not only as an obligation but also as a life-and-death matter, which it actually is!
- Re-double, or better even re-quadruple, your land clearance efforts, so that we can celebrate new countries freed of mines by 2025.
- Promote the treaty vis-à-vis the holdouts, so we see no more use of landmines and welcome new members by the next Review Conference.
- Don't forget us –survivors - this is also our treaty and we have the right to be included, heard, and supported. Our legs are not back, once the mines are gone.
- Continue providing funding and ensure that no country, no community is left behind, until the job is fully finished.
- Take good care of the unique partnership with us - civil society, that has been at the heart of the treaty and its continued success is dependent on it.

Let us all work harder and better together to deliver on that promise of a world free of mines, in years, not decades.

Thank you.