

IMPACT OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR 1997

By

Jody Williams

Overview

In 1997, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize jointly to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and myself. In its statement, the Committee said it was awarding us the Prize for our having made the “utopian dream” of a Mine Ban Treaty a “virtual reality,” thereby providing the framework for the possibility of a mine-free world. It also was recognizing a new model of diplomacy in which civil society and governments joined in open partnership to deal with a global problem. In making the award, the Committee was lending its support to this partnership, which it hoped would be a model for dealing with other issues of global concern.

While it had been widely rumored that the ICBL was under consideration by the Nobel Committee, it is fair to say to none of us honestly anticipated that the young movement would be awarded the most prestigious humanitarian award in the world. The ICBL was then and remains now a coalition of independent non-governmental organizations united in their goal of achieving a world free of landmines, with a coordinator and Steering Committee to help guide the overall work of the movement. The “shock” of the announcement for the unprepared Campaign did – for a brief period – exacerbate some relatively minor differences that are inevitable in a global coalition effort made up of strong individuals and organizations, many of whom deal with a myriad of issues.

A testament of the commitment of the various NGO members of the ICBL to achieving our common goal is how quickly we adjusted to that “shock,” continued our forward movement and became perhaps an even stronger campaign in the aftermath of the Nobel Peace Prize announcement of 10 October 1997. Without a doubt, the impact of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize a few short weeks after the successful negotiation of the Mine Ban Treaty in September of 1997 was enormously important to the ban movement, both in the immediate and in the longer term. The fate of the new model of diplomacy – particularly in the post-9/11 world – is a bit less certain. Personally, reflecting on the seven years since the announcement, I am more comfortable in the role of a Nobel Laureate and have come to deeply appreciate and understand the importance of such role models in today’s world.

The Impacts

On the Mine Ban Treaty

The awarding of the Nobel Prize to the ICBL had an immediate impact on government action on the newly negotiated Mine Ban Treaty. The final negotiations of

the Treaty took place over a three-week period in September of 1997 and some ninety countries were involved. But taking part in treaty negotiations does not necessarily mean that a nation will sign a treaty, and even as the negotiations concluded, there was much uncertainty and concern about how many of those states would actually respond to the invitation to participate in the signing of the Treaty in Ottawa, Canada on the 3 and 4 of December of that year. Some of us even feared that the attrition could be significant by the time of the signing ceremony, and that significant attrition could be a huge deterrent to seeing the Treaty become binding international law. But that fear never became reality.

Within days of the Nobel announcement, for example, the Japanese government – which had been closely aligned with the US government which had walked out of the Treaty negotiations on the final day – made a rather dramatic and high profile announcement that it had re-evaluated its position in view of the Nobel Prize and would sign the Mine Ban Treaty. The momentum continued, reaching proportions that few of us would have ever predicted: Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and other high government officials from 122 nations gathered in Ottawa that December to sign the treaty in an event watched around the globe. Less than one week after that dramatic event, the ICBL and myself were in Oslo, Norway for the Nobel ceremonies.

In terms of the mine ban movement itself and the implementation of and compliance with the Treaty, most would assess that our momentum continues almost unabated. As of the time of the First Review Conference of the Treaty, held in Nairobi from 29 November – 3 December 2004, 144 nations were party to the Treaty, and an additional eight had signed but not yet ratified. Compliance with the treaty provisions has been impressive and by every measure, we continue to see progress toward a world free of the daily terror of antipersonnel landmines. Mine action programs remove more and more landmines from the ground in countries all around the world, resulting in fewer and fewer new landmine victims every year. That progress is enhanced and assured through the ongoing partnership of civil society and government that transformed the utopian dream of a Mine Ban Treaty into working reality.

On the ICBL and Its Membership

The ICBL remains an absolutely incredible global coalition that unites an impressive array of nongovernmental organizations working in a variety of ways in about 85 countries around the world to advance the Mine Ban Treaty framework for a mine-free world. Individual members of the Campaign have gained great strength and credibility in their own countries – and in many cases internationally – by virtue of their work with the ICBL.

I have quite literally watched individual campaigners beginning to work in newly emerging democracies be transformed from timid, uncertain voices into true and highly credible agents of change in their countries. Many, as they have learned and grown in the ICBL, have expanded their work to other peace and justice issues as well. Their

individual credibility has been immeasurably enhanced by the recognition of the ICBL with the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Peace Prize has opened doors to us that I believe would have remained largely closed, despite the successes of the ICBL itself. We have often joked that before receiving the Prize, when we called the Embassies of various governments to arrange meetings to discuss the landmine issue, we would be lucky if we would be met by the second cousin of the third secretary of a country's Embassy team! The doors of officials of all types around the world have been opened to us since the Nobel Prize, and that entrée has obviously greatly enhanced our work and its impact.

The ICBL has continued to be a dynamic actor in the ban movement as well as a unique innovator in civil society contributions to peace and disarmament. One of the most highly regarded aspects of its post-Treaty negotiation work is the creation of the ICBL's Landmine Monitor initiative. A global network of researchers gathers country-by-country data on all aspects of Treaty implementation and compliance, providing the basis for its annual Landmine Monitor Report, which is regarded as the absolute baseline against which we measure ongoing progress toward a mine-free world. The Landmine Monitor initiative is being studied as a model for measuring compliance of other international conventions.

The ICBL has also spurred other initiatives to deal with weapons issues – such as the Cluster Munition Coalition as well as NGO work to mitigate the impact of all explosive remnants of battle that carry the effects of war long into the post-conflict period in countries around the world. In every instance, it is the ICBL's coalition effort – recognized by the Nobel Committee – that is held as the standard of how to approach the various problems being tackled.

On the Diplomatic Model

In some ways, it is harder to assess the impact of the Nobel Prize on the diplomatic model that the Committee sought to highlight. Even as the ICBL and the governments that made the Mine Ban Treaty possible lauded the indispensable role of the civil society-government partnership in the process, many of us predicted a backlash from governments and civil servants alike who saw their prerogatives threatened by a diplomatic process that was open and inclusive. While no one questions the continuing importance of the partnership in insuring implementation and compliance of the Mine Ban Treaty, many try to describe the ban movement as a “one-off success” that is applicable only to the landmine problem and could not possibly be duplicated to address other global concerns.

Despite the pressures for diplomatic “business as usual,” there have been other successful initiatives that have followed much of our model – these have included the campaign against the use of child soldiers and the particularly impressive effort to establish the International Criminal Court (ICC). The NGO coalition in support of the

ICC worked closely with governments to insure its establishment – this despite the tremendous pressure to derail the effort by the United States.

These initiatives, particularly the high profile and highly regarded Mine Ban Treaty process, also resulted in a new initiative on the part of many of the same governments that had been the core of the ban movement to establish an initiative to redefine security in terms of human security and not national security based on over-weaponization of an already over-weaponized world. That “Human Security Network,” a top-down attempt at change, has been hampered in its efforts by the lack of civil society partnership in defining and promoting the conception of a world in which providing for human security is seen as enhancing global security overall. The human security framework has also been weakened by the re-emergence of the belief that the sovereign state, by insuring its own national security, is the primary actor in determining peace and security issues in the post-September 11 world.

Personally

If the ICBL itself quite quickly recovered from the “shock” of the announcement, I can say that personally coming to grips with it took a bit longer. I have been with the ICBL since its birth, having been asked to take on its creation as a political coalition to eliminate antipersonnel landmines; today I serve as one of its “Campaign Ambassadors” to continue to advance our goal of a mine-free world. When we established the ICBL, we had absolutely no idea how far our initiative would take us. We certainly did not believe that within the space of less than seven years the world would have a Mine Ban Treaty – and that our work would be recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize.

In my role as founding coordinator, I sought to increase the number of NGOs that were part of the network and energize them to coordinated action for change. Each member had to “own” the effort and be invested in its success. The best way to insure that was to make sure that each knew what steps the others were taking and the successes or failures that each had. Information is power and I saw one of my primary roles in the coalition to be certain that informed was shared throughout the growing campaign. And that everyone was part of the planning for campaign actions to advance the mine ban movement. Empowering everyone in the ICBL was and is key to its success. Perhaps I was at the center of the web that became our global network, but I always have seen myself as one of many, united by our common goals in the landmine campaign.

With my receipt of the Nobel Prize, along with the ICBL, I became much more “the face” of the landmine movement than I ever had been before. Being by nature an introvert and very much happy and comfortable with helping move along the landmine work as but one of many of the ICBL’s leaders, the abrupt shift into the public eye was quite difficult to adjust to on a personal level. We all recognized how much the recognition would advance our work, but it took me quite some to come to terms with and adjust to the personal implications of having received the Nobel Prize.

I very firmly believe that what is important is not the title one might bear, but the work one does to make the planet a better place for us all. While I certainly understand the importance of public figures that can serve as positive role models in the world, it was hard to adjust to and accept that for myself as a result of the Nobel Prize. Yet there have been moments that have made it all quite clear to me.

On 30 November 2004, I was in Nairobi for the First Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty. Shirin Ebadi, the Peace Prize recipient for 2003, was with us in Kenya to introduce her Iranian landmine NGO to the ICBL and for other activities we planned, such as a joint panel discussion with Peace Prize recipient for 2004, Wangari Maathai. Shirin and I had been speaking to a group of young people assembled at a teachers college in Nairobi. After we had spoken and had a lively exchange session with the students, we were speaking individually with small groups on our way out of the school. Two beautiful young Kenyan Muslim women came up to me and shyly asked if they could speak with me for a moment. Clothed in black, with flowing head scarves, their faces were glowing and their smiles impressive as they said in chorus that listening to me speak and had made them so proud to be women and helped them believe they too could make a difference in our world.

It is countless similar incidents that I have experienced as I have traveled around the world that have made me understand and personally accept the importance of being a positive model for peaceful change – particularly for young women everywhere. As time has passed, I have become a bit more comfortable with that public role. At the same time, in some ways I feel the weight of responsibility as a Nobel Prize recipient more with each passing year, particularly as our world seems to be going through a period of especially dramatic change and turmoil.

Conclusion

In short, I have no doubt that the impact of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1997 has been wide and deep and enduring – both for the ICBL and for me personally. It has helped us immeasurably to advance our work to rid the world of landmines. And as our work has advanced, the Mine Ban Treaty that is the product of that work continues to be a powerful example of international law that can and does work. Our model for change, while under attack at times, continues to be an inspiration to people all over the world who believe that if we work together – civil society and governments – we can create a world where human security forms the basis for global security which in turn will give us the peace, justice and equality that each and every human being deserves.

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