

NOBEL LECTURE

by Jody Williams Coordinator, International Campaign to Ban Landmines

Your Majesties, Honorable Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies and Honored Guests:

It is a privilege to be here today, together with other representatives of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, to receive jointly the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. Our appreciation goes to those who nominated us and to the Nobel Committee for choosing this year to recognize, from among so many other nominees who have worked diligently for peace, the work of the International Campaign.

I am deeply honored -- but whatever personal recognition derives from this award, I believe that this high tribute is the result of the truly historic achievement of this humanitarian effort to rid the world of one indiscriminate weapon. In the words of the Nobel Committee, the International Campaign "started a process which in the space of a few years changed a ban on antipersonnel mines from a vision to a feasible reality." Further, the Committee noted that the Campaign has been able to "express and mediate a broad range of popular commitment in an unprecedented way. With the governments of several small and medium-sized countries taking the issue up...this work has grown into a convincing example of an effective policy for peace."

The desire to ban land mines is not new. In the late 1970s, the International Committee of the Red Cross, along with a handful of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), pressed the world to look at weapons that were particularly injurious and/or indiscriminate. One of the weapons of special concern was landmines. People often ask why the focus on this one weapon. How is the landmine different from any other conventional weapon?

Landmines distinguish themselves because once they have been sown, once the soldier walks away from the weapon, the landmine cannot tell the difference between a soldier or a civilian -- a woman, a child, a grandmother going out to collect firewood to make the family meal. The crux of the problem is that while the use of the weapon might be militarily justifiable during the day of the battle, or even the two weeks of the battle, or maybe even the two months of the battle, once peace is declared the landmine does not recognize that peace. The landmine is eternally prepared to take victims. In common parlance, it is the perfect soldier, the "eternal sentry." The war ends, the landmine goes on killing.

Since World War II most of the conflicts in the world have been internal conflicts. The weapon of choice in those wars has all too often been landmines -- to such a degree that what we find today are tens of millions of landmines

contaminating approximately 70 countries around the world. The overwhelming majority of those countries are found in the developing world, primarily in those countries that do not have the resources to clean up the mess, to care for the tens of thousands of landmine victims. The end result is an international community now faced with a global humanitarian crisis.

Let me take a moment to give a few examples of the degree of the epidemic. Today Cambodia has somewhere between four and six million landmines, which can be found in over 50 percent of its national territory. Afghanistan is littered with perhaps nine million landmines. The U.S. military has said that during the height of the Russian invasion and ensuing war in that country, up to 30 million mines were scattered throughout Afghanistan. In the few years of the fighting in the former Yugoslavia, some six million landmines were sown throughout various sections of the country -- Angola nine million, Mozambique a million, Somalia a million -- I could go on, but it gets tedious. Not only do we have to worry about the mines already in the ground, we must be concerned about those that are stockpiled and ready for use. Estimates range between one and two hundred million mines in stockpiles around the world.

When the ICRC pressed in the '70s for the governments of the world to consider increased restrictions or elimination of particularly injurious or indiscriminate weapons, there was little support for a ban of landmines. The end result of several years of negotiations was the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). What that treaty did was attempt to regulate the use of landmines. While the Convention tried to tell commanders in the field when it was okay to use the weapon and when it was not okay to use the weapon, it also allowed them to make decisions about the applicability of the law in the midst of battle. Unfortunately, in the heat of battle, the laws of war do not exactly come to mind. When you are trying to save your skin you use anything and everything at your disposal to do so.

Throughout these years the Cold War raged on, and internal conflicts that often were proxy wars of the Super Powers proliferated. Finally with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, people began to look at war and peace differently. Without the overarching threat of nuclear holocaust, people started to look at how wars had actually been fought during the Cold War. What they found was that in the internal conflicts fought during that time, the most insidious weapon of all was the antipersonnel landmine -- and that it contaminated the globe in epidemic proportion.

As relative peace broke out with the end of the Cold War, the U.N. was able to go into these nations that had been torn by internal strife, and what they found when they got there were millions and millions of landmines which affected every aspect of peacekeeping, which affected every aspect of post-conflict reconstruction of those societies. You know, if you are in Phnom Penh in Cambodia, and you are setting up the peacekeeping operations, it might seem relatively easy. But when you want to send your troops out into the hinterlands

where four or six million landmines are, it becomes a problem, because the main routes are mined. Part of the peace agreement was to bring the hundreds of thousands of refugees back into the country so that they could participate in the voting, in the new democracy being forged in Cambodia. Part of the plan to bring them back included giving each family enough land so that they could be self-sufficient, so they wouldn't be a drain on the country, so that they could contribute to reconstruction. What they found: So many landmines they couldn't give land to the families. What did they get? Fifty dollars and a year's supply of rice. That is the impact of landmines.

It was the NGOs, the non-governmental organizations, who began to seriously think about trying to deal with the root of the problem -- to eliminate the problem, it would be necessary to eliminate the weapon. The work of NGOs across the board was affected by the landmines in the developing world. Children's groups, development organizations, refugee organizations, medical and humanitarian relief groups -- all had to make huge adjustments in their programs to try to deal with the landmine crises and its impact on the people they were trying to help. It was also in this period that the first NGO humanitarian demining organizations were born -- to try to return contaminated land to rural communities.

It was a handful of NGOs, with their roots in humanitarian and human rights work, which began to come together, in late 1991 and early 1992, in an organized effort to ban antipersonnel landmines. In October of 1992, Handicap International, Human Rights Watch, medico international, Mines Advisory Group, Physicians for Human Rights and Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation came together to issue a "Joint Call to Ban Antipersonnel Landmines." These organizations, which became the steering committee of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines called for an end to the use, production, trade and stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines. The call also pressed governments to increase resources for humanitarian mine clearance and for victim assistance.

From this inauspicious beginning, the International Campaign has become an unprecedented coalition of 1,000 organizations working together in 60 countries to achieve the common goal of a ban of antipersonnel landmines. And as the Campaign grew, the steering committee was expanded to represent the continuing growth and diversity of those who had come together in this global movement. We added the Afghan and Cambodian Campaigns and Rädä Barnen in 1996, and the South African Campaign and Kenya Coalition early this year as we continued to press toward our goal. And in six years we did it. In September of this year, 89 countries came together -- here in Oslo -- and finished the negotiations of a ban treaty based on a draft drawn up by Austria only at the beginning of this year. Just last week in Ottawa, Canada, 121 countries came together again to sign that ban treaty. And as a clear indication of the political will to bring this treaty into force as soon as possible, three countries ratified the treaty upon signature -- Canada, Mauritius and Ireland.

In its first years, the International Campaign developed primarily in the North -- in the countries which had been significant producers of antipersonnel landmines. The strategy was to press for national, regional and international measures to ban landmines. Part of this strategy was to get the governments of the world to review the CCW and in the review process -- try to get them to ban the weapon through that convention. We did not succeed. But over the two and one-half years of the review process, with the pressure that we were able to generate -- the heightened international attention to the issue -- began to raise the stakes, so that different governments wanted to be seen as leaders on what the world was increasingly recognizing as a global humanitarian crisis. The early lead had been taken in the United States, with the first legislated moratorium on exports in 1992. And while the author of that legislation, Senator Leahy, has continued to fight tirelessly to ban the weapon in the U.S., increasingly other nations far surpassed that early leadership. In March of 1995, Belgium became the first country to ban the use, production, trade and stockpiling domestically. Other countries followed suit: Austria, Norway, Sweden, and others. So even as the CCW review was ending in failure, increasingly governments were calling for a ban. What had once been called a utopian goal of NGOs was gaining in strength and momentum.

While we still had that momentum, in the waning months of the CCW review, we decided to try to get the individual governments which had taken action or had called for a ban to come together in a self-identifying bloc. There is, after all, strength in numbers. So during the final days of the CCW we invited them to a meeting and they actually came. A handful of governments agreed to sit down with us and talk about where the movement to ban landmines would go next. Historically NGOs and governments have too often seen each other as adversaries, not colleagues, and we were shocked that they came. Seven or nine came to the first meeting, 14 to the second, and 17 to the third. By the time we had concluded the third meeting, with the conclusion of the Review Conference on May 3rd of 1996, the Canadian government had offered to host a governmental meeting in October of last year, in which pro-ban governments would come together and strategize about how to bring about a ban. The CCW review process had not produced the results we sought, so what do we do next?

From the third to the fifth of October we met in Ottawa. It was a very fascinating meeting. There were 50 governments there as full participants and 24 observers. The International Campaign was also participating in the Conference. The primary objectives of the conference were to develop an Ottawa Declaration, which states would sign signalling their intention to ban landmines, and an "Agenda for Action," which outlined concrete steps on the road to a ban. We were all prepared for that, but few were prepared for the concluding comments by Lloyd Axworthy, the Foreign Minister of Canada. Foreign Minister Axworthy stood up and congratulated everybody for formulating the Ottawa Declaration and the Agenda for Action, which were clearly seen as giving teeth to the ban

movement. But the Foreign Minister did not end with congratulations. He ended with a challenge. The Canadian government challenged the world to return to Canada in a year to sign an international treaty banning antipersonnel landmines.

Members of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines erupted into cheers. The silence of the governments in the room was deafening. Even the truly pro-ban states were horrified by the challenge. Canada had stepped outside of diplomatic process and procedure and put them between a rock and a hard place. They had said they were pro-ban. They had come to Ottawa to develop a road map to create a ban treaty and had signed a Declaration of intent. What could they do? They had to respond. It was really breath-taking. We stood up and cheered while the governments were moaning. But once they recovered from that initial shock, the governments that really wanted to see a ban treaty as soon as possible, rose to the challenge and negotiated a ban treaty in record time.

What has become known as the Ottawa Process began with the Axworthy Challenge. The treaty itself was based upon a ban treaty drafted by Austria and developed in a series of meetings in Vienna, in Bonn, in Brussels, which culminated in the three-week long treaty negotiating conference held in Oslo in September. The treaty negotiations were historic. They were historic for a number of reasons. For the first time, smaller and middle-sized powers had come together, to work in close cooperation with the nongovernmental organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, to negotiate a treaty which would remove from the world's arsenals a weapon in widespread use. For the first time, smaller and middle-sized powers had not yielded ground to intense pressure from a superpower to weaken the treaty to accommodate the policies of that one country. Perhaps for the first time, negotiations ended with a treaty stronger than the draft on which the negotiations were based! The treaty had not been held hostage to rule by consensus, which would have inevitably resulted in a gutted treaty.

The Oslo negotiations gave the world a treaty banning antipersonnel landmines which is remarkably free of loopholes and exceptions. It is a treaty which bans the use, production, trade and stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines. It is a treaty which requires states to destroy their stockpiles within four years of its entering into force. It is a treaty which requires mine clearance within ten years. It calls upon states to increase assistance for mine clearance and for victim assistance. It is not a perfect treaty -- the Campaign has concerns about the provision allowing for antihandling devices on antivehicle mines; we are concerned about mines kept for training purposes; we would like to see the treaty directly apply to nonstate actors and we would like stronger language regarding victim assistance. But, given the close cooperation with governments which resulted in the treaty itself, we are certain that these issues can be addressed through the annual meetings and review conferences provided for in the treaty.

As I have already noted, last week in Ottawa, 121 countries signed the treaty. Three ratified it simultaneously -- signalling the political will of the international community to bring this treaty into force as soon as possible. It is remarkable. Landmines have been used since the U.S. Civil War, since the Crimean War yet we are taking them out of arsenals of the world. It is amazing. It is historic. It proves that civil society and governments do not have to see themselves as adversaries. It demonstrates that small and middle powers can work together with civil society and address humanitarian concerns with breathtaking speed. It shows that such a partnership is a new kind of "superpower" in the post-Cold War world.

It is fair to say that the International Campaign to Ban Landmines made a difference. And the real prize is the treaty. What we are most proud of is the treaty. It would be foolish to say we that we are not deeply honored by being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Of course, we are. But the receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize is recognition of the accomplishment of this Campaign. It is recognition of the fact that NGOs have worked in close cooperation with governments for the first time on an arms control issue, with the United Nations, with the International Committee of the Red Cross. Together, we have set a precedent. Together, we have changed history. The closing remarks of the French ambassador in Oslo to me were the best. She said, "This is historic not just because of the treaty. This is historic because, for the first time, the leaders of states have come together to answer the will of civil society."

For that, the International Campaign thanks them -- for together we have given the world the possibility of one day living on a truly mine-free planet.

Thank you.