Keynote address by Song Kosal, ICBL Youth Ambassador

Opening Ceremony
11th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
27 November 2011

Jumriep sou,

Welcome to our beautiful Cambodia! I feel so proud to welcome you to my homeland, sometimes called the Kingdom of Wonder. While you are here I want you to see the sugar palm trees in the countryside, the temples of Angkor, Tonle Sap, the mighty Mekong and the smiles of our children. As well we want YOU, all of you to make wonderful things happen here during the 11MSP. We want you to Push for Progress so strongly that this meeting will be the best and most practical ever. It will have results that make life better for those living in mine affected areas so that our dream of a mine free world becomes a reality in our lifetime.

Many of you have seen my face in different parts of the world, Ottawa, Oslo, Mozambique, Geneva, Bangkok, Nairobi, Croatia, Cartagena, Santiago, France, Japan, Spain, and Australia. Now you are here in my motherland. I want you to continue to partner with Cambodia to be a world leader for peace and disarmament and care for the poorest in our society. Many of the poorest are affected by the legacy of war and mines and cluster munitions.

I come from Battambang the most heavily mine affected province in the country. When I was a small girl I sometimes sat and watched children playing freely in the fields and wished I had my leg back. Sometimes too the sounds of war, boom, boom, boom, came close and I ran away with my family. I also saw people, probably refugees, coming back from the camps to live near my village. In Battambang I saw many other people without arms or legs or eyes who had been injured by landmines. It was a long road to peace.

Even today many mines still lie in the ground killing and hurting people. Cambodia has reduced the number of new victims dramatically but even one new victim is too many. The special virtue of Cambodia is metta karuna which means loving kindness. So for the people who have been injured by mines and the mine affected communities we ask metta karuna and a justice where their rights are respected and their voices heard.

We need funding for our brave mine clearers who work very hard to make the countryside safe. And here I like to say thank you to them and remember the ones who have died.
Many people say the heart of the Mine Ban Movement is Cambodia. In many ways this is true. The story of the suffering caused to land mine survivors here made people want to ban mines. The first survivors who told their own story to the world were Cambodians. We did this at the UN in Vienna in 1994 and in Geneva in 1995 and six of us are here tonight. Our conference here in Phnom Penh in 1995 was the beginning of campaigns all around the world. In Cambodia we were so proud that our King and our Prime Minister supported our campaign to ban landmines way back in 1993 and 1994. They were part of the movement that led to the Mine Ban Treaty.

However Cambodia is only one part of the story that led to this treaty. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines coordinated by Jody Williams began in 1992, and grew to have members in more than 100 countries. The ICRC and governments like Norway, Austria, Canada and Belgium were leaders in the movement too.

The Treaty grew out of an alliance between civil society and government, where ICBL, NGOs, governments, ICRC and UN worked together to eliminate land mines from the planet. In Ottawa in 1997, 122 countries joined the Treaty. We want to see this same alliance strongly and clearly this week here in Phnom Penh. Governments and NGOs, international organizations, faith leaders and ordinary people working together so people live in dignity and freedom from fear.

Tomorrow morning you will be greeted at the door with a very simple scarf by our dancing wheelchair survivors and their friends. These dancers smile but sometimes they cry for a world where no more people are injured by deadly weapons lying in the ground years after war is over. These scarves will say push for progress which is our campaign slogan for 2011.

Push for progress in the Peace Palace in Phnom Penh!

What progress are we pushing for?

1. Accelerating mine clearance using all safe methods to make more land available for use and knowing precisely how much of the world’s land still needs to be demined.

2. Identification and destruction of all existing stockpiles of landmines.

3. Ensuring that rights of survivors are upheld and needs of survivors are addressed using the twin track approach. My big goal is that every survivor in the remotest village has a truly human quality of life, that together with other villagers they participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

4. Sustained funding and international cooperation to finish the job.
5. That mines are never used again anywhere! Not made, not sold, not laid in our earth. Never again!

6. That all countries become part of the mine ban community.

A big job but we can do it together!

I call on you, leaders of all countries to be part of a peaceful world future, of a world without mines where children can walk free from fear, where youth use their intelligence to eradicate poverty not to make weapons, where old people can look back and say all the effort and energy we spent campaigning was worth it. We won a treaty. When people in mine affected areas live in dignity and no more mines threaten their lives, when no one produces or lays new mines then we have truly won! Push for progress all week and until we finish the job!

Thank you!