Obama Should Heed Nobel Laureates' Call to Ban Landmines

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15 Nobel Peace Prize Recipients urge President Obama to join Mine Ban Treaty

Geneva, 30 November 2010 - US President Barack Obama should heed the call from 15 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates and join the 1997 treaty banning antipersonnel landmines, said the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) today. The Nobel Laureates' call was made in a letter sent to President Obama today as more than 100 governments—including the US—are meeting in Geneva to assess the significant progress to date in implementing the Mine Ban Treaty and to plan for the future.

At the direction of President Obama, the US has been engaged in comprehensive review of its landmine policy and its position on the Mine Ban Treaty since late 2009, shortly after the announcement that President Obama would receive the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. The review is expected to conclude soon.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its then-coordinator Jody Williams, an American, were jointly awarded the prize in 1997 for their role in bringing about the Mine Ban Treaty.

"We hope that President Obama, as a fellow Nobel Peace Laureate, will listen to our call to ban landmines and ensure the US takes the necessary steps to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty," said Jody Williams, now ICBL ambassador and chair of the Nobel Women's Initiative. "Anything less than a total ban on antipersonnel landmines would be a half-measure, falling short of the US leadership that is needed."


In the letter, the Nobel Peace Laureates express their hope that the US landmine review "will be guided by the humanitarian concerns that have already led 156 nations to ban the weapon, including nearly all US military allies."

The letter notes, "United States accession to this important instrument would bring great benefits to the US and the world. It would strengthen US national security, international security, and international humanitarian law. It would help strengthen the fundamental goal of preventing innumerable civilians from falling victim to these indiscriminate weapons in the future, and help ensure adequate care for the hundreds of thousands of existing survivors and their communities. US membership would help spur to action the 39 states that remain outside the treaty."

This week the United States is participating as an observer in the Tenth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty in Geneva, Switzerland. The US first participated in a formal Mine Ban Treaty meeting in November 2009, when it attended the Second Review Conference of the treaty in Cartagena, Colombia.

The ICBL, which is active in 90 countries, has worked to achieve universalisation and implementation of the treaty, which comprehensively bans antipersonnel mines, requires destruction of stockpiled mines within four years and destruction of mines already in the ground within ten years, and urges extensive programs to assist the victims of landmines.

"The Nobel Committee bestowed the Peace Prize on President Obama for his efforts to strengthen international diplomacy, to simulate disarmament, and to give people hope for a better future," said Sylvie Brigot, executive
director of the ICBL. "At this time, joining the Mine Ban Treaty would certainly be one of the best ways for him to fulfill the promise of his Nobel Peace Prize."

In addition to the ICBL and Jody Williams, several Nobel Peace Laureates have long expressed concern at the humanitarian impact of antipersonnel mines and have worked for their eradication:

- The NGO founded by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (1980), Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ), has worked to ensure that the Mine Ban Treaty is ratified and implemented throughout Latin America.
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1984) publicly endorsed the call for a ban on antipersonnel mines in March 1995, when he was president of the All Africa Conference of Churches. Tutu opened a regional conference on landmines held in South Africa in May 1997 that proved instrumental in building African-wide support for the creation of a strong treaty to ban antipersonnel mines.
- His Holiness Dalai Lama (1989) endorsed the call for a total ban on landmines in 1995 at the urging of the Supreme Patriarch of Cambodian Buddhism, Maha Ghosananda, and Cambodian landmine survivors.
- Rigoberta Menchú Tum (1992), Betty Williams and Mairead Maguire (1976), and the three other founders (Williams, Ebadi, and Maathai) of the Nobel Women’s Initiative, established in 2004, have actively supported the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Activities have included statements to annual meetings of the Mine Ban Treaty, media work, and outreach to governments that have not yet joined.
- José Ramos-Horta (1996) spoke out against landmines and other weapons designed to inflict pain and death in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. When he became the Timor-Leste's first Minister of Foreign Affairs, the government acceded to the Mine Ban Treaty, making it the first disarmament treaty that the new country joined after independence.
- Shirin Ebadi (2003) launched the "Mine Clearing Collaboration Campaign" in 2004 to demand that Iran take greater action to clear mines laid during the Iran-Iraq war, assist mine victims, and join the Mine Ban Treaty.

For additional information, see:

- Nobel Peace Prize: [http://nobelprize.org/index.html](http://nobelprize.org/index.html)

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