

Shirin Ebadi launches Iranian landmine campaign, urges Iran to join the Treaty

Shirin Ebadi, 2003 Nobel Peace Laureate, launched her “Mine Clearing Collaboration Campaign” at the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World held in Nairobi, Kenya 29 November – 3 December. At the Summit, Ms. Ebadi briefed government, non-government and international organization delegates, as well as the media, about the landmine problem in her country. Mines were laid by both Iran and Iraq during their 8-year war, from 1980 – 1988.

“Today, 15 years after the end of the war, the land is still contaminated and people are becoming victims of landmines. Iran is a rich country, but it lacks political will to clear the landmines. The government is not interested,” said Ms. Ebadi. She noted that she became aware of this issue when she received a letter from a child survivor from the contaminated area four years ago and began to look into the issue and speak about it. She indicated that there had been no publicity and awareness-raising in her country.

“I can speak about it as I am a Nobel Peace laureate, and have protection that comes with this honor. But we expect our government to fulfill their responsibility and promises to the people. They should have cleared the mined areas, they could have cleared the mined areas, long ago – a country as rich as Iran should not contain even one hectare of mined land 15 years after the end of the war. We call on the Iranian government to join the Treaty banning landmines, to clear the mined areas in our country and help the victims.”

She added that while their movement was just beginning, they hoped others would join and support them. Shohab Hakimi, Director of the Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Mine Dog Center, one of the largest non-governmental mine clearance organizations in Afghanistan, offered to share experiences of more than 10 years of mine clearance in Afghanistan and invited Ms. Ebadi and members of her organization to visit Afghanistan. Handicap International described their program for rehabilitation and disabled in Bam, Iran and sought assistance in working with the Iranian government and facilitating their ability to share expertise in Iran. Ms. Ebadi cautioned international NGOs working in Iran, with the Iranian government, to insist on the inclusion of Iranian NGOs in their programs. Ms. Ebadi also encouraged the United Nations agencies to urge the Iranian government to join the treaty. She also encouraged government delegates at the Summit to ask their governments to urge Iran to join the Treaty. “Many governments meet with my government, trade with my government, and they tell us they never raise the issue of landmines. Tell them it matters. We need and appreciate outside pressure.”