

Norwegian Intervention at the Third Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention 26 June 2014.

- **By State Secretary Hans Brattskar of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Thank you Mr President.

The Mine Ban Convention has been a tremendous success. When it was negotiated and adopted in 1997, it was an appropriate response from the international community to a global humanitarian crisis caused by landmines in general, and antipersonnel mines in particular.

In the fifteen years that have passed since its entry into force, the Convention has been the only comprehensive framework to address the full range of humanitarian and developmental problem caused by landmines. The key to its success has been its combination of preventive and responsive provisions, backed by generous long-term funding, and an increasingly competent implementation community.

By establishing a legal prohibition against all production, trade and use, banning stockpiling and requiring the destruction of existing stockpiles, the Convention has virtually brought an end to the use of antipersonnel mines. It has also ensured that large areas previously contaminated by mines have been made safe for productive use by communities and states.

The Convention has fostered innovative partnerships. It is unique in the sense that its stakeholders are not only the states party, but also a dynamic mine ban community made up of various civil society organisations, the ICRC and United Nations entities. Few, if any other international disarmament instrument has such a robust, dedicated and competent support community.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines was an entirely new initiative, bringing together organisations with different mandates, constituencies and political cultures in a highly effective advocacy campaign – global in outreach, but firmly grounded in local contexts. The ICBL was firm in its dealings with states, but at the same time constructive in common efforts to find solutions. Its arguments were always based on facts and

on experience gained in the field.

The ICRC made a bold move under the visionary leadership of its President at the time, Mr Cornelio Sommaruga, by taking a clear and public stand in favour of banning antipersonnel mines, long before the Convention was a reality. Similarly, the national Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations played a crucial role in supporting and promoting national campaigns for a ban.

The Convention was adopted at a time when the international system for disarmament and the protection of civilians was struggling for legitimacy and credibility. The adoption and entry into force of the Convention significantly strengthened International Humanitarian Law at a critical time. The increased focus on protection of civilians we have seen in the last decade can to a large degree be attributed to the success and timeliness of the Convention. It is worth remembering that in December 1996, 157 Member States voted in favour of resolution 51/45S, which urged states to pursue a legally binding international agreement to ban the anti-personnel landmines as soon as possible. This is also an important reminder for us all of the role the United Nations can play in improving the protection of civilians.

In addition, a number of states, led by Canada, took a series of unprecedented, and at the time bold, steps that resulted in the establishment of the Convention. This shows that the actions of individual states matter, especially when taken in partnership with other states and other actors.

The fact that we now are in Maputo, for the second time in the life of this Convention, is highly significant. When the Convention came into existence, Mozambique was one of the five most mine-affected states in the world. In Mozambique, landmines represented a very concrete threat to the safety and integrity of individuals and their communities. They were also an obstacle to post-war reconstruction, refugee return and economic development. At the time, the task of once again making the country mine-free seemed overwhelming. Now, fifteen years later, we are guests of a state that has risen to the challenge and will soon have cleared all mined areas of its territory.

Norway has been a partner to Mozambique in addressing the problem of landmines for more than two decades. For us this has been a rewarding partnership that has given us many important insights. In recent years, our cooperation has been organised under a framework agreement that has become a model for international cooperation. Mozambique is now entering a new phase in its work to implement the Mine Ban Convention and we look forward to continuing our close cooperation in this area.

This is the Third Review Conference and a time both to take stock of experiences and achievements, and to adjust our course for the coming period. Above all, we should recognise that landmines are no longer causing a humanitarian crisis on the global scale, as they did one or two decades ago. The Convention is the main reason for this. Not only are 161 states parties bound by the Convention, but most other states have also come to accept its provisions as a general norm. It has facilitated the clearance and release of suspected and confirmed mined areas on a vast scale. And, not least, the mine action community has revised the vastly overstated estimates of the landmine problem that guided this sector for too many years.

The landmine issue is far from solved, but it has changed in magnitude. It is no longer a global problem, but a national and local one. The challenges entailed in addressing the landmine problem have also changed radically. There is more knowledge about how to deal with suspected or confirmed mined areas in cost-effective and safe ways. New technology and, more importantly, better methodologies have resulted in the development of a highly sophisticated and efficient mine action sector.

The landmine problem will never be “over” for the thousands of survivors worldwide, who will have to live with its legacy for the rest of their lives. But the Convention has been instrumental in changing attitudes and norms, and in recognising the rights of landmine survivors. Its implementation in practice has shaped the broader work on safeguarding the rights of war victims and people with disabilities, in particular the groundbreaking

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

These developments mean that the role of national authorities is more important than ever. We know that while international assistance and relevant technology is important for effective mine clearance, it is only part of the picture. Effective mine action cannot take place unless the national authorities have set this as a political priority.

So we must shift our focus from the multilateral arenas to the affected countries where the problem actually exists. This means spending less on general discussions and global processes and more on concrete actions in the field. In short – less talk and more action.

For these reasons, Norway has argued for a reduction in the resources spent on the implementation architecture, including our formal and informal meetings. This architecture is there to respond to implementation needs in affected areas, not to facilitate discussions with little or no bearing on the actual implementation in the field. The work led by Mozambique to revise the committee structure and the meeting programme is a commendable response to this. We would like to go significantly further, but in the circumstances we are prepared to join consensus in support of the work undertaken by Mozambique.

In the coming period, Norway will continue to support the implementation of the Convention and efforts to address the landmine problem. Our priority will be action in affected areas, efforts to ensure the rights of victims in a sustainable manner, and support to national authorities that are willing and able to prioritise mine action. In addition, we will continue to support the important monitoring work done by the civil society and the ICRC.

In conclusion, let me concur with those who have expressed their support to the proposed outcome documents from this Conference: the revision of our programme of work and committee structure, the Maputo Action Plan and The Maputo declaration on a mine free world. Let me also add that the cooperation we have had with the Mozambican team, both in Geneva and in Maputo, has been excellent.

Finally Mr President, on behalf of Norway, I would like to congratulate Mozambique, both on hosting this successful conference and on successfully meeting its obligations to clear all mined areas.

Thank you