



ICRC

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**16th Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use,
Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their
Destruction**

Vienna, 18 December– 21 December 2017

Address by Peter Maurer,

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Ladies and gentlemen

Twenty years ago anti-personnel mines were a regular, lethal feature of armed conflicts across the world. It did not matter to the weapons if the victim was combatant or civilian: they struck indiscriminately. Twenty thousand people, the vast majority of them civilians, were being killed or mutilated by anti-personnel mines every year.

Between 1985 and 1995, 20 percent of the war victims that ICRC treated were victims of mines.

Amid a swell of global condemnation, one of my predecessors, ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga, was incensed by the impact of these weapons, which he described as ‘abominable... (and) a destructive technology out of control’.

He called on the international community to uphold a ‘moral, political and legal obligation and to put an end to the mass destruction in slow motion’ caused by anti-personnel landmines.

The global crisis caused by anti-personnel mines required a global solution: the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. It was the result of a remarkable partnership between states, civil society and international organizations, including the ICRC and the broader International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. And achieving the treaty would not have been possible without the determined advocacy of landmine survivors themselves.

The treaty brought unprecedented attention to the plight of the people and communities affected by landmines and other unexploded ordnance. And it was extraordinary in its approach:

- It was the first time that a weapon in widespread use had been prohibited due to its appalling human, economic and social costs;
- It was the first treaty of international humanitarian law to prohibit not only the use of a weapon but also its production, stockpiling and transfer... and to require its elimination, merging humanitarian and disarmament imperatives; and

- It also demanded that states provide assistance for victims and mobilize resources to clear contaminated land.

And let us not forget that this progress was also possible because of the support of many members of the armed forces who understood early on the problems associated with the use of anti-personnel mines.

Today the goal of a world-free of anti-personnel mines is within reach. Broad adherence to the treaty has seen the use of anti-personnel mines largely diminished, more than 53 million anti-personnel mines destroyed, and the legal trade in these weapons has virtually disappeared. And as a result, countless number of lives have been saved and suffering prevented.

However, on this anniversary, I fear that we have reached a critical crossroad.

Landmine victims may not be on the front pages of the newspapers as they were in the 1980s and 1990s, but in recent years mine casualties have risen sharply in some countries. Anti-personnel mines, in particular improvised mines, are taking a heavy toll on civilians in places including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. Shockingly children accounted for 42% of all civilian casualties.

Today, 35 states remain outside of the Convention, and many of these have huge stockpiles, totaling an estimated 45 million units. I do not wish to think of the casualties if these weapons were ever used.

I urge all States that have not yet joined the Convention to regularly reassess the military need for anti-personnel mines in light of their severe humanitarian costs. The global community of States and organizations that have supported the Convention over the past 20 years are eager to welcome you as State Parties.

The ICRC sees all too often in our hospitals and rehabilitation centres the injuries caused by mine blasts. We work to fit victims of explosions with prostheses for missing limbs and to help them live a full life. We also conduct, and will continue to do so, Mine Risk Education and support mine clearance to prevent accidents and reduce the effects of weapon contamination.

In 2014, States Parties expressed a determination to meet key goals of the Convention by 2025, that is, in just seven short years. There must be greater urgency and determination to ensure that the 2025 goals become a reality. Focused effort must be directed to make certain that by 2025:

- All stockpiles still held by States Parties are destroyed;
- Contaminated land is cleared within the Convention's deadlines and the 2025 commitments; and
- Victims get greater access to the care, rehabilitation and socioeconomic services they need to allow them to participate in their societies on an equal basis to others.

Even more important is the commitment for funds to accomplish these. I urge all state parties in a position to do so to provide the resources, and exert influence where necessary. By 2025 the ICRC would like to see affected States Parties landmine free and with no new victims on their territory. It is equally important to ensure that no affected State Party is left behind in this process. As has been highlighted by many States and organizations this is bold and ambitious. But we believe a world free of anti-personnel mines is within our grasp. The international community must again use its collective determination, harness this remarkable partnership to overcome these challenges. As the 2025 deadline approaches, there is not a moment to waste.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention is a shining example of how the international community can respond to a global humanitarian crisis caused by a conventional weapon in widespread use. Since then, new treaties have been adopted to protect civilians from explosive remnants of war and to prohibit cluster munitions. Short of developing new law, reaffirming and ensuring respect for existing IHL rules and adopting robust policy responses are also critical means to protect civilians from the indiscriminate effects of weapons.

In conflicts around the world we see what happens when weapons are used without regard for civilian life, when the internationally agreed constraints of distinction, proportionality and precaution are disregarded. As we are witnessing in particular in the ongoing armed conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Ukraine, to give but these examples, the use of heavy explosive weapons in densely populated areas is having disastrous consequences for civilians. For example when a city is shelled the consequences are not limited to death, physical injury, but also include damage to critical infrastructure such as water and electrical facilities and supply networks, with domino effects including severe disruption to essential civilian services, leading to the spread of diseases and further deaths.

Given the enormous costs for civilians, ICRC calls on all parties to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effect in densely populated areas, due to the significant likelihood of indiscriminate effects. All States should be in a position to apply this as a matter of good practice, to ensure better protection for civilians in urban warfare

Ladies and gentlemen,

My message today to the international community is to harness the goodwill and common action that led to the adoption of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention. I call on you to maintain vigilance against all weapons that cruelly and indifferently impact on civilians and for the wisdom of humanity, and humanitarian law, to prevail.