

16MSP Opening Ceremony Speech
Vienna Dec 18, 2017

Mired Raad Zeid Al-Husseini - *Special Envoy*

Your Excellency Mr. Michael Linhart, Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs of Austria,
Your Excellency Thomas Hajnoczi, President of the 16MSP
Your Excellencies, Dear Friends,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here with you all to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and to attend the 16MSP. At the outset I would like to convey to you all the warm greetings and best wishes of our king...His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al-Husseini...who has been a staunch supporter of the Convention since its inception. I also would like to extend my deep gratitude to Austria, Secretary General Linhart and H.E. Ambassador Hajnoczi for hosting us all so graciously in Vienna and for presiding over the coming meeting.

I have had the good fortune of being intimately involved with the machinations of the Convention since 2004. I was appointed as the chairman of our national mine action authority...the 'National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation' only two weeks before the Nairobi Review Conference. And since then have attended all the review conferences (Nairobi, Cartagena & Maputo) and all the MSPs with the exception of two since 2004, as well as having hosted and presided over the 8MSP in Jordan by the shores of the Dead Sea in 2007. In other words, my team and I have been busy with the landmine issue for the last thirteen years!

In 2004 when I first started, I viewed the challenge as truly daunting...we had very little capacity as an organization, weak management and practically no money...moreover I myself felt like I was thrown into the deep end as my own knowledge of mine action was limited only to 'victim assistance.' To

be totally honest I thought of the challenge as ‘Mission Impossible,’ but also quickly realized that we had no other alternative but to get to work and to be serious about achieving our goals.

Now when I think back and consider all what we have done in Jordan since the signing of the Convention in 1997, I feel immensely proud of our achievements and know full well that despite humungous odds and seemingly insurmountable challenges the ‘mine action’ cause is doable. In 2004, we had roughly 200,000 landmines in the ground and by April 2012 we were able to declare all our minefields cleared. With the generosity of donor states and good management/coordination and with the crucial participation of the Norwegian People’s Aid...we were able to get the job done.

I have also had the great privilege of working alongside HRH Princess Astrid as a ‘Special

Envoy' of the APMBC, a role which I have taken very seriously and which I have considered as a tremendous honour and a big responsibility. HRH Princess Astrid has done truly remarkable work for the Convention and has exerted incredible efforts for the 'universalization' of the Convention. I have tried to follow in HRH's path, and since 2009 have visited a number of States not party to the Convention in an attempt to engage them at the highest of levels on the issue of universalization and to discuss with them the possibility or likelihood of future accession. I have also visited a number of States Parties that have been facing 'implementation' difficulties in order to discuss with them ways and methods of pushing on with implementation according to their respective national plans and or the extension requests approved by the States Parties.

So...as a result of this modest experience in mine action that I have enjoyed, I would like to very humbly submit to you some observations that I have made over the course of the last 13 years regarding the Convention and how I see the future.

1. Demining is very doable...as we all know...however it demands a great deal of effort, a serious approach, political will, financial resources and in most cases ‘national ownership.’ If all these elements can be mustered the likelihood of success is great. We need not look too far back, recent successes of contaminated countries and continued progress in other countries is a testament to this.

2. Many mine-affected States that are members of the Convention are struggling to complete their obligations or fulfill their commitments according to their respective extension

requests. It is incumbent on all of us to encourage these States at all levels...to inject energy and a sense of urgency to complete. We must do all we can to sustain the interest of all states in mine action for as long as possible...to maintain and safeguard the health and stamina of the Convention.

3. Regarding victim assistance...we as States Parties...talk and talk and talk a lot about this issue but in reality little is done and donor funding on this issue has been short of what is required. I believe that survivors in most of our countries would echo this sentiment loud and clear. I think we need to take an honest look at the plight of survivors in our respective countries and take concrete steps to intensify our victim assistance efforts and through our efforts support all persons with disability in affected communities. First and foremost

States Parties that have not also acceded to the CRPD should do so in earnest.

4. On universalization...more can and ought to be done. Again we talk a lot about this issue hoping that by some miracle States not Party will all of a sudden change tack and accede. In my humble view this is very unlikely...what is needed is a comprehensive and concerted plan of action of engagement. If States Parties commit to engage at the highest of levels and if it is well orchestrated we will most likely see better results. I must note and congratulate the President for taking the first steps in establishing an informal universalization working group to begin our coordination efforts.

5. The APMBC has been a great success over the course of the last 20 years. We have a lot to be

proud of. However...as we are all saying...a great deal is left to be accomplished. Especially if we take into consideration the vast minefields with millions and millions of landmines that still exist in the States not Party, as well as their massive stockpiles of landmines. While it is a good thing that we are congratulating ourselves over the achievements of the past but we must also do a reality check and not become complacent as our overall goal of achieving a mine-free world is unfortunately still far off in the distant future.

Lastly...I would like to reiterate how unbelievably important the ISU is. I have had the pleasure and honour of working very closely with the fine people who make up the ISU and I honestly believe that it should always be handsomely funded and its 'wings' should not be clipped. The ISU could and

should do much more...if we allow it to. The Convention needs teeth and a resurgence of the passion and sense of urgency that once was...all of which could be provided by a more empowered, robust and well-funded ISU. I am personally very grateful to the few States that fund their work and to the European Union that has entrusted them with the implementation of their Council decision. In Maputo we all declared our commitments and resolve to see the implementation of the Convention in the near term and we adopted an action plan with a road map to get there. Together, we will do this.

I thank you all very dearly for giving me the honour of addressing you today and wish everybody success during the 16MSP.

Thank you to you all.