10th Anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention

Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention
18 September 2007, Oslo Conference Center

Opening Statement by Stein Tønnesson

Mr. State Secretary, thank you.

Your Royal Highness, other Activists, Bureaucrats, Journalists, Academics, Nobel laureates, Excellencies, Mr. State Secretary, and the remaining Ladies and Gentlemen as well:

In the ten years since the Mine Ban Convention was agreed upon here in Oslo, it has represented a unique milestone on the way to a better, more peaceful world.

- The treaty is historic in that it called for a total ban on a weapon that has taken the lives and destroyed the livelihoods of millions; if one weapon can be totally abandoned, then other weapons may be abandoned as well.
- The Mine Ban Convention is historic because it was not just part of the disarmament agenda, which aims primarily to reduce the risk of war and the suffering in case of war, but was driven by a humanitarian agenda, aiming to reduce real current suffering in all those parts of the world that are infested by landmines.
- The Convention is furthermore historic because it brought together a unique coalition of peace activists, peace researchers, non-governmental organizations, and governments winning a diplomatic victory together.

At the time, many scoffed at the notion that a campaign to eradicate landmines could succeed. “Powerful states are opposed to it,” said the whisperers at the cocktail parties. “Strong national interests are involved. Cheers to the idealists, but in matters like these, it is realism that counts.” For quite some time, the diplomatic realists did not take the campaign seriously. Meanwhile it gained momentum. And against all odds it succeeded, in part because of some fortuitous circumstances – this we must admit – but mainly
because the campaign held the moral high ground through the inherent superiority of its arguments, and also because a certain number of individuals in and out of governments were sufficiently perceptive to see the chance, and grasp it. The Convention became a reality, and it inspired new confidence in the possibility of advancing a humanitarian global agenda. The Ottawa Process first transformed the “implausible” to the “possible”, and then changed the “possible” to reality.

Today the best way to celebrate our victory ten years ago is not just to toast and congratulate each other, but look ahead at remaining and new challenges. Much still remains to be done to fully implement the provisions of the Mine Ban Convention. We know that innocent civilians are still being maimed and killed by the millions of mines that remain in the ground; and we know that social and economic development is being impaired by their presence -- but we also know that we are moving towards a mine-free world.

Other parts of the humanitarian agenda have seen much less progress. When the Mine Ban Convention was signed, we sensed a kind of tacit bureaucratic and political resistance front being formed with the aim to prevent the example of the Mine Action community from setting a precedent for other multilateral processes. This resistance was not without effect. We cannot be satisfied with what has been achieved since 1997. Indeed there have been serious setbacks. It is high time to develop strategies for reigniting the humanitarian agenda, and once more create a political momentum for progress not just in fulfilling the mine action agenda, but in making progress in other areas. The State Secretary mentioned cluster ammunitions. Here too we obviously hold the moral high ground. The effect of cluster ammunitions are horrific. I wonder if, ten years from now, it will be possible to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention, not as a unique milestone, but as the first of several milestones, setting a new paradigm in the global politics of peace.

Thank you.