



Press Release

December 7, 2012

United States Declares Decision on Joining Mine Ban Treaty Is Coming “Soon”

GENEVA: At the Twelfth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty, the United States observer delegation stated that the US will be announcing the outcome of its three year review of its landmine policy—and whether or not it will join the treaty—“soon.”

In the statement, Steve Costner, deputy director of Weapons Removal and Abatement at the U.S. Department of State, said, “We have not made a decision on United States accession to the Convention. Our review has identified operational issues related to accession that require careful consideration. This consideration is ongoing, and we expect to be able to announce a decision soon.”

In response, the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines (USCBL) held a briefing to discuss the statement and the status of the review. Speaking as a member of the panel, Costner indicated that “soon” meant—at the least—that an announcement of the decision of the review would take place no later than the next Meeting of States Parties in November 2013.

Civil society campaigners at the conference recognized that this was the first time the administration has indicated publicly that the review is nearing conclusion, but were disappointed that there was no mention of an actual end date for the review; information about the current stage of the process; or what “operational issues” had been identified—and what strategy was being implemented to overcome them.

“On the one hand, we were happy to see the continued engagement of the U.S.,” said Zach Hudson, USCBL coordinator. “And it was also positive to hear that the review would be completed ‘soon.’ But on the other hand, at this point we expected a stronger statement. This process has been languishing for three years now. We hope the President will now take bold action at the beginning of his second term and ban this weapon once and for all.”

At the briefing, Costner also stated, in response to questions about the “operational issues” cited in the statement, “We’ve made real progress. We’ve identified the issues. Our homework is done. Now it’s about looking at the options and going forward.”

The United States reportedly retains some 10 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines for potential future use. With Poland’s imminent ratification of the treaty, also announced at this conference, the U.S. is now one of only 36 countries in the world that have not joined the Mine Ban Treaty—and is the only member of NATO that is not a States Party, and the only country in the Western Hemisphere, aside from Cuba, that has not joined.

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Over the past three years, Obama and his administration have received letters of support for U.S. accession to the Mine Ban Treaty from 68 Senators, nearly 100 leaders of prominent U.S. nongovernmental organizations, key NATO allies, U.S. military personnel, 16 Nobel Peace Prize recipients, landmines survivors and countless citizens from around the world.

“The U.S. was the first government to call for the elimination of antipersonnel landmines in the 1994, but then President Clinton postponed joining the treaty until 2006, and President Bush did away with that goal altogether,” said Steve Goose, executive director of the Arms Division at Human Rights Watch and Head of the ICBL Delegation. “We’re still waiting.”

One hundred and fifteen countries are registered at the States Party Meeting—including the United States and 17 non-States Parties participating as observers.

-30-

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The USCBL, currently coordinated by Handicap International, is a coalition of thousands of people and U.S. non-governmental organizations working to: (1) ensure no U.S. use, production, or transfer of antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions; (2) encourage the U.S. to join the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions; and (3) secure high levels of U.S. government support for clearance and assistance programs for victims of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war.

The USCBL is the U.S. affiliate of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)—the co-laureate of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize—and is a member of the Cluster Munition Coalition, an international coalition working to protect civilians from the effects of cluster munitions by promoting universal adherence to and full implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.