

November 30, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

As your fellow Nobel Peace Laureates, we are writing to urge the United States to join the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. We are pleased that a review of US policy on antipersonnel landmines is underway and trust that it will be guided by the humanitarian concerns that have already led 156 nations to ban the weapon, including nearly all U.S. military allies.

As you know, the Nobel Committee awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and its then-coordinator Ms. Jody Williams for their work in support of the banning and clearing of antipersonnel mines. Several other Nobel Peace laureates have long expressed concern at the humanitarian impact of this weapon and have worked for its eradication.

We understand that policy deliberations can be complicated, particularly on military matters and arms control. Yet in this instance we believe that there is a clear case to be made for the moral and humanitarian imperative for the US to relinquish antipersonnel mines and join the Mine Ban Treaty – especially since it has closely followed the core obligations of the Mine Ban Treaty for many years now.

The US is not known to have used antipersonnel mines since the first Gulf War in 1991. It became the first country in the world to unilaterally ban exports of the weapon in 1992. It has not produced antipersonnel mines since 1997, and has already destroyed approximately 3 million of its stockpiled mines. For almost two decades, the US has been the largest funder of global mine clearance and victim assistance programs.

United States accession to this important instrument would bring great benefits to the US and the world. It would strengthen US national security, international security, and international humanitarian law. It would help strengthen the fundamental goal of preventing innumerable civilians from falling victim to these indiscriminate weapons in the future, and help ensure adequate care for the hundreds of thousands of existing survivors and their communities. US membership would help spur to action the 39 states that remain outside the treaty.

We appreciate that as President, you have many aspects to consider in making such a decision. But we also know that you feel deeply the suffering of the innocents affected by war and its aftermath, and should have no trouble recognizing that the devastating impact of landmines on civilians is a terror of its own sort.

As your Nobel colleagues, we strongly urge you to join the Mine Ban Treaty, and thereby legally ban a weapon that the US has in practice already eschewed for almost 20 years.

Most sincerely,
Mairead Maguire (1976)
Betty Williams (1976)
Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (1980)
Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1984)
Elie Wiesel (1986)
Oscar Arias Sánchez (1987)
His Holiness Dalai Lama (1989)
Rigoberta Menchu Tum (1992)
F.W. De Klerk (1993)
José Ramos-Horta (1996)
Jody Williams (1997)
John Hume (1998)
Shirin Ebadi (2003)
Wangari Maathai (2004)
Mohamed El Baradei (2005)

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