



Press Release

For Immediate Release  
December 1, 2009

### **U.S. Reacts to Civil Society Outcry Corrects Position and Announces Comprehensive Landmine Policy Review**

CARTAGENA, Colombia – In a statement Tuesday, the head of the U.S. delegation to the Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty informed participants that the Obama administration has begun a comprehensive landmine policy review. In the statement, the U.S. representative said, “The Administration’s decision to attend this Review Conference is the result of an on-going comprehensive review of U.S. landmine policy initiated at the direction of President Obama.”

The statement represents a reversal of the position first outlined by Department of State spokesperson Ian Kelly in response to a reporter’s question during a briefing last Tuesday, November 24. Kelly’s original announcement was followed by a fierce outcry from civil society, non-governmental organizations and the international community. The United States Campaign to Ban Landmines (USCBL); its parent organization, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL); and Senator Patrick Leahy and Congressman Jim McGovern all delivered harsh criticism of the policy position. These censures, along with others, have continued throughout the Second Review Conference, which opened in Cartagena this week.

In reaction to the administration’s initial statement that it would not join the Mine Ban Treaty, Senator Leahy said on the Senate floor Tuesday morning [1 December], “By announcing our intention to join the treaty in Cartagena, this Administration would have signaled to the rest of the world that the United States is finally showing the leadership that has been wanting on these indiscriminate weapons that maim and kill thousands of innocent people every year...The Administration’s approach to this issue up until this past weekend has been cursory, half-hearted, and deeply disappointing to those of us who expected a serious, thorough reexamination of this issue. One would hope that an Administration that portrays itself as a global leader on issues of humanitarian law and arms control recognizes this is an opportunity.”

With the U.S. announcement in Cartagena of a new corrected position, the USCBL is guardedly hopeful that progress toward accession to the treaty can once again resume.

“We’re glad they’re here, and that they have formally announced a landmine policy review. That’s a good first step,” said Zach Hudson, coordinator of the USCBL. “Now we need to hear how this review will be conducted. We want to hear about a structured timeline with a reasonable end date. We want assurances that the process will also include voices of NATO allies, legislators and the NGO community that has been working in the trenches on this issue for the past few decades.”

The USCBL believes that the old arguments used by the U.S. to defer joining the treaty in 1997 are no longer relevant. Some U.S. officials have cited the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq as reasons for not joining. However, both of these countries are States Parties to the treaty, and as parties have not only banned antipersonnel landmines, but are also prohibited from assisting the United States in any way with use of landmines. The U.S. is also already in *de facto* compliance with most of the treaty’s provisions. Despite not being a signatory, the U.S. has not used antipersonnel mines since 1991, has not exported them since 1992 and has not produced them since 1997.

[more]

“We want to believe the administration will conduct this review with an openness to joining the treaty,” said Steve Goose, the director of the Arms Division at Human Rights Watch and ICBL spokesperson. “After last week’s announcement, we want to be sure this policy reversal is not just going through the motions to correct a process that rightly angered many civil society organizations and U.S. legislators. This is a fresh start, and we are looking forward to closely collaborating in the review process.”

The United States is currently one of only 39 countries that have not yet joined the treaty. In the Western Hemisphere, only the U.S and Cuba are non-signatories. Every other member of NATO except Poland (which has already signed and will ratify in 2012) are also States Parties to the treaty. While being one of the first governments to call for the eventual elimination of landmines in the mid-1990s, the U.S. did not sign the treaty when it opened for signature in 1997. Instead, President Clinton set 2006 as the goal for the United States to join. President Bush reversed this decision in 2004.

The U.S. announcement was made during the historic “Cartagena Summit on a Mine Free World,” the Second Mine Ban Treaty Review Conference, taking place November 29–December 4. More than 1,000 people and 120 governments are participating in this five-year review conference, including dozens of foreign ministers and defense ministers. The U.S. is attending the conference as an observer.

-30-

**CONTACTS:**

**Lea Radick**, Communications Officer, USCBL, Phone: +1 (301) 891-3002,  
E-mail: [lradick@handicap-international.us](mailto:lradick@handicap-international.us)

**Zach Hudson**, Coordinator, USCBL, Phone: +1 (917) 860-1883,  
E-mail: [zhudson@handicap-international.us](mailto:zhudson@handicap-international.us)

*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, transfer and export 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 demining and assistance programs for victims of landmines, cluster munitions and other unexploded 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.*