



Press Release

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**U.S. Attends Mine Ban Treaty Meeting as Observer:  
Civil Society Frustrated by Languishing U.S. Landmine Policy Review**

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA: The Eleventh Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty concluded Friday in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The United States attended the conference as an observer, but two years after launching a review of U.S. landmine policy, the Obama administration has still not announced plans to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty and end the use of antipersonnel landmines.

"We were pleased to see the U.S. send a delegation to this annual meeting and continue its engagement with the Mine Ban Treaty," said Zach Hudson, the coordinator of the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines (USCBL). "But the policy review that the administration announced at the 2009 meeting has gone on for long enough. It's time for the administration to conclude the review and submit the treaty to the Senate for ratification or explain its rationale for continuing to follow the Bush policy of near isolation in remaining outside the convention."

Over the past two years, Obama and his administration have received letters of support for 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.

Although acknowledging this valuable input the U.S. has received during the landmine policy review, the U.S. delegation also confirmed in a statement made during the conference that no decisions have yet been made.

In the statement, the U.S. delegation first congratulated Cambodia "for hosting this important event," then recognized all those who have contributed to the policy review, and concluded by saying, "The United States applauds the significant accomplishments to date by Parties to the Ottawa Convention in addressing the humanitarian impact of anti-personnel landmines, and we remain committed to a continuing partnership with other states, governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in this effort."

Many civil society organizations have voiced concerns that, despite the U.S.'s laudatory comments, not enough is being done within the administration to ensure that the policy review is moving forward quickly and that any obstacles to joining the treaty are isolated and overcome.

"We have been hearing the same thing from the administration for the past two years—that the review process is actively moving forward and that progress is being made," said Hudson. "Assurances of progress just aren't good enough anymore. Two years of 'We're working on

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it...’ is not a satisfactory response to the countless innocent landmine survivors and mine impacted communities that are waiting on President Obama to promise that the U.S. will finally ban landmines once and for all.”

The Eleventh Meeting of States Parties was attended by close to 100 governments, including most of the 158 Mine Ban Treaty States Parties and 15 Non-States Parties such as the United States. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) delegation of more than 270 campaigners from 61 countries, including dozens of landmine survivors, also participated in the meeting. This group was also comprised of several members of the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines.

Nora Sheets, a USCBL member and a school teacher who founded the West Virginia Campaign to Ban Landmines student group, has been following the landmine policy review closely. “We hope that President Obama, as a Nobel Peace Laureate committed to humanitarian values, will finally fulfill the promise the U.S. made back in 1997 to join the Mine Ban Treaty,” Sheets said. “I have been working with the civil society campaign for the past 12 years. We are citizens—students, teachers, landmine survivors, development workers—who are committed to a world free of landmines. We cannot allow any more innocent children to become victims of these horrific weapons.”

A group of landmine survivors representing ten countries also met with the U.S. delegation during the conference to urge forward the policy review towards a speedy accession to the treaty.

“There are many civilians who become new casualties every year from landmines that were laid by U.S. forces during prior conflicts,” said Firoz Ali Alizada, a landmine survivor who attended the meeting with the U.S. delegation, and campaign manager of the ICBL. “All of us are represented here at the conference—those who have survived; those families who have lost children, spouses, and siblings killed by these weapons; families that are still afraid that someone else will be killed or maimed today by another landmine that still remains from some prior U.S. conflict from decades ago; and communities concerned that the U.S. could choose to lay landmines again at any time. We are all here to call on the United States to stop this cycle of violence and join the Mine Ban Treaty now.”

The U.S. has not used antipersonnel mines since 1991 (in the first Gulf War), has not exported them since 1992, has not produced landmines since 1997, and is the biggest donor to mine clearance programs around the world. However, it still retains 10.4 millions of stockpiled antipersonnel mines for potential future use. The U.S. is one of only 38 countries in the world that have not joined the Mine Ban Treaty—and is the only member of NATO that is not a signatory, and the only country in the Western Hemisphere, aside from Cuba, that has not joined.

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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.*