



Press Release

**For Immediate Release**  
**May 8, 2010**

**68 Senators Have Signed a Letter to President Obama  
Calling on the U.S. to Join the Mine Ban Treaty**

WASHINGTON, DC: This week a letter asking the administration to accede to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty will be delivered to President Obama by 68 Senators including ten Republicans and two Independents—signifying a key two-thirds Senate majority.

“The fact that there are 68 signatories on the Senate letter is especially important given that accession to the treaty must be ratified by a two-thirds majority in the Senate,” said Zach Hudson, the coordinator of the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines (USCBL). “The strong support these letters received demonstrates that Congress stands with our NATO allies, and with Americans around the country, in calling for the U.S. to join the Mine Ban Treaty.”

Sen. Patrick Leahy (VT-D) and Sen. George Voinovich (OH-R) circulated the Senate letter, and a similar letter, circulated by Rep. James McGovern (MA-D) and Rep. Darrell Issa (CA-R) in the House will also be delivered to President Obama this week.

In the letters, legislators note the effectiveness of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, saying, “In the ten years since the Convention came into force, 158 nations have signed including the United Kingdom and other ISAF partners, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan which, like Colombia, are parties to the Convention and have suffered thousands of mine casualties. The Convention has led to a dramatic decline in the use, production, and export of anti-personnel mines.”

Legislators also advocated for a landmine policy review aimed at ultimate accession to the treaty, concluding that they were “confident that through a thorough, deliberative review the Administration can identify any obstacles to joining the Convention and develop a plan to overcome them as soon as possible.”

These letters follow a letter sent to President Obama on March 22 by leaders from 65 nongovernmental organizations that also urge the U.S. to relinquish antipersonnel landmines and join the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty without delay.

The United States began a comprehensive landmine policy review in late 2009 at the direction of President Obama. The U.S. has not used antipersonnel mines since 1991 (in the first Gulf War), has not exported them since 1992, has not produced them since 1997 and is the biggest donor to mine clearance programs around the world. However, it still retains 10.4 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines, some dating to the 1970’s, for potential future use and has not joined the 1997 treaty prohibiting the weapon. In 1998, President Clinton set the goal of joining the treaty in 2006, but President Bush reversed course in 2004 and declared that the U.S. would not join.

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In the Senate and House letters, legislators indicated that the use of weapons that disproportionately take the lives and limbs of civilians is counterproductive in today's conflicts and is avoidable, saying, "We note that our NATO allies have addressed their force protection needs in accordance with their obligations under the Convention. We are also mindful that anti-personnel mines pose grave dangers to civilians, and that avoiding civilian casualties and the anger and resentment that result has become a key priority in building public support for our mission in Afghanistan. Finally, we are aware that anti-personnel mines in the Korean DMZ are South Korean mines, and that the U.S. has alternative munitions that are not victim-activated."

Through the work of the USCBL and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), campaigners from around the world have also been meeting with dozens of U.S. embassies and U.S. representatives during the past two months to urge the U.S. to ban antipersonnel mines and join the Mine Ban Treaty.

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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.*