

Oral Statement by Heidi Kuhn, Executive Director, Roots of Peace

The United States and the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty
Washington, DC
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It's my great honor to be here in my nation's capital. I have come here today from California. I would like to begin my remarks by describing how an idea can turn into a reality in a great country such as the United States of America.

In September 1997, General Robert Gard, Mary Wareham, Caleb Rossiter, and Jerry White came into the living room of my family home to talk about the global landmine problem and the new Mine Ban Treaty. I'm a mother of four children and a cancer survivor. Holding my child in my arms, I listened to the words of these people in my home in Marin county. It inspired me so deeply to do something outside of my front door. We lifted our glasses to toast that the world may go from mines to vines, replacing the scourge of land mines with bountiful vineyards worldwide. Today, I must proudly say that Roots of Peace has taken that model out of the front door of our home seventeen years later to demine, replant, and rebuild worldwide. Rice in Cambodia, grapes in Afghanistan, orchards in Croatia, wheat in Iraq, and demining the Holy Lands.

I can say thank you to so many people in this room for taking such courageous footsteps. With Jody Williams in September 2001, only days before the attacks in US, I walked in minefields of Croatia to where I had a vision to replace the mine fields with bountiful vineyards on the Dalmatian coast. By removing landmines we could plant a bountiful vineyard that vitners such as those in the San Francisco Bay area have supported. We have proved that around the world that when we can remove a landmine and plant a vine to produce grapes, raisins, pomegranates.

I have worked in Vietnam, where Roots of Peace now has over 1,000 farmers nearly 40 years after the war has ended. In Angola we cleared landmines with the support of thousands of American children who raised 50 million American pennies for peace. So that the fields where Princess Diana walked are now demined and children with three legs to stand on—two crutches, one good leg—are now playing soccer in Huambo. In Afghanistan, Roots of Peace today is operating a 100 million dollar contract. As a CEO, wife, and mother, I manage today in 2014 a spring like never before in a country where there are millions of landmines in all 34 provinces. Afghanistan is a country that is 80% dependent on agriculture and turning those swards into ploughshares is the most important thing we could be talking about in this room today.

I am so grateful to the United States of America for I am only able to implement the planting of the roots of peace with thanks to funding from USAID, USDA, DoD, European Union, and the World Bank. No idea is turned into a reality without a tremendously dedicated group of people as those here in this room today. May the footsteps that we take beyond this room inspire others to join this effort to eradicate landmines.

I would like to conclude by saying that a couple weeks ago, I was in the Holy Land. From my humble perspective as a mother, the Holy Lands is not Holy when there are land mines in the

ground. Last year I commuted from San Francisco to Tel Aviv eight times, where with the funding of incredible California vineyards, we have turned mines to vines in the fields of Bethlehem. On the visit of Pope Francis to the Holy Land on May 24, he will stand in the Holy Land on the soils of Jordan, because he cannot come in through Israel due to the landmines that have been laid. The minefields are in sight of Qasr al-Yahud, where three faiths converge: the baptismal sight of Jesus Christ where Elijah rose to Heaven, the place where Israelites crossed over into Cannon according to the Torah, and where Mohammad walked the Abrahamic paths. So as the delegation of the Holy Father prepares to go Bethlehem may we be reminded of mothers who give birth in a manger or anywhere else in the world. It takes eight pounds to detonate a landmine and it takes eight pounds to give birth to a child. May we speak today on behalf of the mothers around the world who have no voice. Join us in the leadership of Jody and so many others who remove these deadly seeds of hatred from our one Earth.

Thank you.