Oral statement by François Rivasseau, European Union Delegation to the United States

United States and the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty event
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Thank you very much, it is of a very special honor and pleasure to be with you all today to open this symposium on the United States and the 1997 Mine Ban Convention or, as we used to call it, the Ottawa Convention.

When I look around this room, I see a number of faces I know, particularly Jody Williams. I remember when the first efforts for this convention were launched by Jody, by Steve Goose, and by others present here today. At that time, I was a diplomat as I am here today and I had to bang my chest and say we were not immediately convinced by the call for a ban on landmines. At that time, I was number two in Geneva supporting France’s disarmament representative, Ambassador Joelle Bourgois. Eventually the French government decided to support your efforts and this is how the Mine Ban Treaty came to life. It is not a single child, but also has a smaller brother, with the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions. And maybe the family is not yet closed because the nice thing with treaties is that a new one can come to light in more than one lifetime.

The European Union since has struggled to follow the example that you have set with the Mine Ban Treaty. Since the Mine Ban Treaty entered into force for Poland on 1 July 2013, all 28 members of the European Union are now unified under your banner. The European Union is now united in pushing for a mine free world with a long history of support of ending the suffering caused by antipersonnel mines in all of its member states.

In anticipation of this unified position, on 13 November 2012, the Council of the European Union in the context of its European Security Strategy adopted a decision to support implementation of a 2010-2014 action plan for the Mine Ban Convention. As part of the Council decision, the European Union is seeking to support efforts on part of States Parties to the Convention to implement the mine clearance and victim assistance aspects of the Cartagena Action Plan as well as universalization of the Convention and its norms.

Based on its achievements to date the Mine Ban Convention is an unparalleled success story in the humanitarian field and its successes will continue. But people are still dying from landmines every day. We still need money spent on clearance and victim assistance. The EU does not have unlimited resources, but we have decided to streamline our procedure to try to spare as much as possible administrative costs.

If we don’t want the humanitarian success to be a Sisyphus rock and always restart again, we have to work on universalization of the Mine Ban Convention. This is why we are so honored to have you with us Prince Mired. We have a high level task force for universalization that you lead. I was so impressed when I met you almost ten years ago and happy that you have accepted this responsibility.
Major landmine producers must join the Mine Ban Convention and accept the prohibition on these weapons otherwise landmines will be available and could be used. You extinguished a fire here and then a new fire begins there. So the only way to avoid that is to make progress on universalization.

With respect to universalization, the European Union is providing funding to the Mine Ban Convention’s implementation support unit to carry out three initiatives: 1) organizing high-level engagement with States not Party to the Convention, 2) carrying out a study on border security without the use of antipersonnel landmines, and 3) holding national workshops and symposiums such as this event. So we hope to advance fruitful discussion on the ways and means to overcome barriers to universalization of the Convention.

As you know, the Mine Ban Convention’s preamble states the feasibility for every member of the United Nations to join the Convention and it goes without saying that it would be highly desirable to have the United States finally join the anti-landmine movement. Without the United States joining, the chance for convincing major producers to do the same is seriously reduced. I hope that we will hear a variety of creative views pointing to how this might be possible.

Meanwhile in the European Union we are working on preparations to develop an action plan for the Maputo Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention in June 2014. My colleague Rory Domm and I would be glad to discuss that with you.

Now I need to give the floor now to Jody Williams. Jody, I hope that banning landmines remains close to your heart as well as working to prevent violence against women, another important cause. And maybe the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots will be the next child in our future work. Jody, the floor is yours.