

Oral statement by Prof. Ken Rutherford, Center for International Stabilization and Recovery, James Madison University

The United States and the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty event
Washington DC
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I want to start by acknowledging Nora Sheets and her young students who have joined us from Morgantown this morning. They are a motivating force to ban land mines in West Virginia, but I hope they do not have to continue the task that we began to ban landmines.

I want an answer to what is it going to take for the Obama Administration to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty.

Twenty years ago I gave my first speech on landmines at the first US Senate hearing on the issue called the “Global Humanitarian Landmine Crisis.” It was May 13, 1994. I didn’t know anything about landmines, but had received a fax—yes, a fax—from Jody Williams, introducing me to the issue, and an invitation from Senator Patrick Leahy’s staff to testify at the hearing. That was after the landmine incident in Somalia a few months earlier, which resulted in the loss of both of my legs.

I was honored to testify because I thought I was a unique story, but unfortunately it’s not a unique story. Tens of thousands of people are being injured, maimed, and killed every year around the world. Now, it’s down to four thousand victims every year, but even one victim is too many. So here we are twenty years later in Washington, DC, and I’m getting bored of giving the same speeches.

I’m getting bored of why our government is continuing, as Jody said, to be frustrating and confusing and mind-boggling on the topic of banning landmines and joining the Mine Ban Treaty. As His Royal Highness Prince Mired just said, it’s a “no brainer” to join this treaty.

So I say why can’t the Obama Administration sign? This is the twentieth anniversary of the world’s first global humanitarian mine program within the US government. The US government has given more than two billion dollars over the past twenty years to help alleviate the negative effects of landmines and other unexploded ordnance. Last year, the State Department provided more than 189 million dollars to over 35 countries, which was more than any other country. The US has by far given more financial assistance to mine action over the last two decades than any other country in the world.

That is a wonderful Madison Avenue PR story and yet this US government is not here in the room to explain it. My question is why? I hope to give you the answer.

As you heard, it was 22 years ago that Senator Leahy introduced the first legislation in the world to ban US exports of antipersonnel landmines. It was 21 years ago when the US Department of State issued “Hidden Killers”, the first-ever comprehensive study on the devastating humanitarian effects of antipersonnel landmines. It was 20 years ago this year that President

Clinton became the first leader in the world to call, and I quote, “for the eventual elimination of antipersonnel landmines.” It was 18 years ago, that the United States led a global effort to ban antipersonnel mines. And 15 years ago President Clinton said that one of the biggest disappointments of his administration was not signing the Mine Ban Treaty.

I’m not going to go over what’s happened in the last 15 years as you already know the story.

So the United States took all these initiatives, but why are we here twenty years later discussing why the United States has not joined the ban? Especially when the State Department is doing so much around the world to try to alleviate the negative effects of these weapons?

Among the sticking issues that I’m sure General Gard and Steve Goose will talk about is the command of forces in South Korea. I’d like to point to His Royal Highness Prince Mired, and his beautiful and wonderful Kingdom of Jordan, which is surrounded by not so peaceful states, let’s say. Jordan is a major contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations. It has a well-respected armed forces. Yet, they overcame their own concerns and showed courage by signing the Mine Ban Treaty. If the Kingdom of Jordan can do it, then why can’t we?

In my opinion, enough information and options have been presented to President Obama. So here’s my elevator speech or bottom-line answer to the question that I posed at the beginning of this presentation. President Obama simply needs the political courage to say “yes we can” as he did six years ago. He needs to find a positive way to do the right thing and accede to the Mine Ban Treaty. He has to “be the change” because I ask President Obama, if not you, then who will do it? If you’re not going to take leadership to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty, then who will?

Is it the young students in this room from Morgantown’s responsibility? Perhaps, but I hope not.

So I ask President Obama to send an official representative to the review conference in Maputo in June 2014 and announce that he is going to support the United States joining the Mine Ban Treaty. After all, it is a very easy question that should not be frustrating, confusing, or mind-boggling. And, it’s a no brainer.

Thank you.

Ken Rutherford is professor of political science and director of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA. Rutherford lost both his legs when his vehicle hit a landmine in Somalia on 16 December 1993. Rutherford was an early advocate for the landmine ban and in 1997 co-founded the Landmine Survivors Network, a non-profit organization that worked to promote the rights of landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities. Rutherford has published a number of articles and four books including *Humanitarianism Under Fire: The US and UN Intervention in Somalia* and, most recently *Disarming States: The International Movement to Ban Landmines* (Praeger, 2011). He holds a PhD and MALS from Georgetown University, and MBA and BA from the University of Colorado, where he was a football letterman and inducted in the Hall of Fame for distinguished alumni.