

***U.S. Should Continue to Move Forward
On Banning Use of Antipersonnel Landmines***

November 27, 2001

Dear Colleague,

We invite you to join us on a letter to President Bush urging him to remain firm and support current U.S. policy to move forward in complying with the 1997 international convention to ban the use, production, export and stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines (APLs). Even though the United States has not signed the treaty, the U.S. has been seeking alternatives to the use of landmines, destroying its stockpiles of “dumb” mines, and engaging in a moratorium on the export of APLs. It now appears that the Defense Department is seeking to abandon this path and return to past practices.

The United States initiated the movement that led to the international treaty to ban APLs. Currently, 142 nations have signed the international convention, including all of America’s closest allies. In this period of international collaboration and partnership, now is not the time to turn our backs on the international community and place our policy in direct contradiction with our closest allies.

To sign onto this letter, or for further information, please contact Cindy Buhl with Rep. McGovern at 5-6101, Beth Thompson with Rep. Quinn at 5-3306, or Tom O’Donnell with Rep. Evans at 5-5905.

Sincerely,

James P. McGovern

Jack Quinn

Lane Evans

Dear Mr. President:

We share your eagerness for global and human security during these troubling times. With this in mind, we write to express our serious concern about the direction of the current Administration review of U.S. policy on antipersonnel (AP) landmines. As you know, the Department of Defense has recently completed its component and, after input from the State Department and the National Security Council, the review is expected to reach your desk for approval. We respectfully urge that you ensure that the policy your Administration authorizes takes into account the indiscriminate consequences inherent in the nature of antipersonnel landmines, the danger these weapons pose to civilians and U.S. troops, and the desire to continue U.S. leadership and unity among our key international allies.

We have received reports that the Department of Defense has recently recommended the following changes to current landmine policy:

- 1) The abandonment of U.S. plans to comply with the Mine Ban Treaty by 2006.
- 2) The cessation of efforts to eliminate dumb mines from the U.S. arsenal by 2003.

- 3) The termination of the search for alternatives to AP mines.
- 4) The assertion of the indefinite need for AP mines, both smart and dumb, in Korea and elsewhere, particularly in special operations.

These alarming recommendations are out of step with your own avowed commitment to protect innocent civilians and, indeed, U.S. troops.

As you know, most of the modern militaries in the world, including our major allies in the war against terrorism, have ended their use of antipersonnel landmines because of the weapon's indiscriminate and disproportionate impact on unarmed men, women, and children. The 1997 Mine Ban Treaty's prohibition on the weapon's use, production, transfer, and stockpile has resulted in a significant decrease of landmine injuries and deaths, the destruction of millions of stockpiled weapons, and a virtual end to the transfer of antipersonnel mines. The United States' global leadership in mine clearance and victim assistance has also contributed significantly to decreasing landmine casualties. American leadership is similarly needed to encourage other treaty holdouts to support the global ban.

Mines have caused over 100,000 U.S. Army casualties since 1942, including one third of all casualties in Vietnam and in the Gulf War. On May 19, 2001, nine retired military leaders, including Lt. General James F. Hollingsworth, former Commander of US-ROK forces, expressed their support for the Mine Ban Treaty, stating that the elimination of AP mines from the U.S. arsenal would enhance U.S. combat mobility and effectiveness and protect U.S. servicemen and women. It is clear that changes in tactics, doctrine, or substitution of alternative sensor/weapon systems already available could compensate for antipersonnel landmines in Korea and elsewhere.

Afghanistan is, perhaps, the best example of the reason to eliminate this weapon from our arsenal. In that country there are an estimated 8-10 million landmines in the ground. The *Landmine Monitor 2001* reports that in the year 2000 an estimated 88 people per month were maimed or killed by the weapon in Afghanistan, a nation the size of Texas. Demining operations in that country funded, in part, by the United States, employ nearly 5,000 workers and cost millions of dollars each year. Now U.S. and allied troops in Afghanistan are also at serious risk of losing lives and limbs to this insidious weapon. We encourage you to insist that the Northern Alliance end its use of the weapon and destroy their stockpiled inventory.

Most importantly, we urge you to instruct the State Department and the National Security Council to redirect the landmines policy review to reflect the need for the elimination of this outmoded, indiscriminate weapon from the U.S. arsenal. Only in this way can the United States resume its leadership on this important international issue.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress

cc: Secretary of State Colin Powell
National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice