

Opening Plenary for Mine Action Forum

Chair: His Excellency Ambassador Björn Skogmo, Kingdom of Norway

Keynote Speaker

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada

Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy welcomed participants to the Mine Action Forum, noting "the world's peoples and governments have been engaged in an extraordinary global effort to ban anti-personnel mines, and we've succeeded." When the Ottawa Process began, he said, "I confess to being unsure of the results, but it was a risk worth taking." He noted that more than 100 countries were expected to sign the Treaty in Ottawa — more opening signatories than almost any treaty ever negotiated.

While the Treaty is cause for celebration, the Minister underscored the grief and suffering that landmines still cause around the world. He also urged participants to "stop for a moment to reflect on the wider implications of our work together over the last 14 months," suggesting three lessons that could be drawn from the Ottawa Process:

- International public opinion places limits on human behaviour, even on the battlefield.
- Diplomacy can work in new ways to bring about unprecedented progress.
- A full partnership between states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can lead to results that neither group could achieve on its own.

The Ottawa Process would not have been possible five to 10 years ago, he said. But since then, international fora have opened up to a range of non-state actors, state sovereignty has become more diffuse, and a global commons has emerged in which "civil society has demanded and earned a place at the table... People power has moved onto the international stage." These new voices sent a clear message that "there is no public tolerance for weapons that cause massive civilian casualties."

Axworthy said a treaty drafted by a group of Canadian schoolchildren had put the land mines issue in the clearest and simplest terms: "Children should have the right to play and not get hurt." As the focus of foreign policy decisions shifts from primarily military security interests to human issues of poverty, human rights and environmental degradation, the Minister stressed, "it's no longer enough to ensure the security of the nation. Security is found in the conditions of daily life."

He announced that Canada would ratify the Treaty tomorrow, and challenged participants to ensure that it enters into force within a year, by getting the necessary 40 ratifications. "Does that sound familiar?" he asked.

Mr. Bernard Miyet
*Under-Secretary General, Department of
Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations*

Bernard Miyet, UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, stressed the size and complexity of the task ahead, noting that mine action "is not simply about mines. It's also about people and their interactions with mine-contaminated environments."

Action on land mines must address a wide range of elements and options, including humanitarian and development components, alongside the "core competency" of mine eradication. Miyet said the mandate of the UN's newly-created unit, the Mine Action Service, includes coordination with other UN agencies, member states and outside partners, supporting mine clearance programs, setting up new programs, coordinating information, promoting new mine clearance techniques and technologies, and ongoing advocacy. The Service will work with field programs in countries like Cambodia and Afghanistan, and will also have the flexibility to set up new programs until the UN Development Program or host countries can take them over.