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Nicaraguan Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Edmundo Castilla Salazar talks with Norway's Foreign Minister Knut Vollaabæk and Minister Axworthy after Nicaragua's signing of the Ottawa Convention, December 4, 1997. In front: Ottawa schoolchildren.

# LANDMINES

## The Ottawa Convention

makes a *difference*

This past March 1 marked an important anniversary: exactly one year since the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention—or, to give its full legal name, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

The treaty had been opened for signing a little over two years before, in December 1997. From that time, events moved swiftly. Just 15 months later the Convention came into force, setting a record for an international disarmament agreement. As of March 1 a total of 137 countries had either signed or acceded to the Convention, and 92 had ratified it.

### There have been many other markers of progress:

- The new international norm for anti-personnel (AP) mines has met with widespread acceptance, even on the part of nations that have not signed the treaty. For instance, Russia, China and the United States have all adopted partial bans of some kind on the use, trade or production of AP mines.
- The once-flourishing legal trade in mines has collapsed. The number of mine-producing countries is down from over 54 to 16, including many countries that have not actually manufactured anti-personnel mines in recent years.
- Mine exports have been halted by all but a handful of mine-producing countries.
- Some 17 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed since 1996. Canada, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland and some other countries have destroyed their entire stockpiles.
- Several country-to-country and regional agreements have emerged, with signatories pledging to clear existing minefields and not to plant new ones.
- The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has made progress in its efforts to persuade insurgent and other organizations (in diplomatic jargon, "non-state actors") to observe the ban. Among the groups that have renounced the use of mines are the Taliban of Afghanistan, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit, the Casamance movement of Democratic Forces in Senegal, and fighting factions in southern Sudan.
- Perhaps the most encouraging sign of fundamental change is that there has been no large-scale planting of mines over the past two years.

### Mine clearance

Mine clearance organizations once measured progress by counting the mines removed. Now they count the fields, roads, irrigation systems and other infrastructure returned to productive use. Lack of data and uneven reporting standards make it difficult to estimate gains precisely, but significant progress has been achieved in some of the world's most severely mine-infested countries. For example:

- In Afghanistan, 64 percent of mined residential areas and irrigation systems, and 33 percent of mined roads were cleared from 1993 to 1998. Approximately 93 percent of cleared land is now in productive use.
- In Cambodia, 23 percent of suspect land was cleared or declared mine-free by 1999.
- In Mozambique, about 7400 kilometres of road were mine-free and open for use by 1999.
- In Nicaragua, more than 1.2 million square metres of suspect land has been declared safe since 1993.
- In Jordan, 88 minefields have been cleared, freeing up more than 7 million hectares.