

One of the weaknesses of the Protocol was that under the provisions for dumb anti-personnel mines, there was a long deferral period whereby states could defer action on anti-personnel mines for up to nine years. Many states, including Denmark, Klingenberg said, were uncomfortable with the limited progress after such long and arduous negotiations. Consequently, the global community began to think of a prohibition on existing anti-personnel mines.

The Role of the United Nations in Promoting a Global Ban on Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Prvoslav Davinic
Director, UN Centre for Disarmament Affairs

The UN Secretary General and the general membership can play a role in promoting a global ban on anti-personnel mines, said Prvoslav Davinic. The process leading up to the Ottawa Treaty began outside the UN for practical reasons, he pointed out, but the UN is now firmly involved and the Secretary General has supported the whole exercise "unequivocally". The UN will now take up the challenge and contribute as much as it can to the universal implementation of a global ban on mines.

The Secretary General, who is the depository of the Treaty, can use his "moral authority" to press the issue and to appeal to countries who did not sign the Ottawa Treaty to join as soon as possible. Additionally, the Secretary General can encourage UN member countries to assist those countries who cannot, for financial reasons, destroy their stockpiles of anti-personnel mines. Member states to the UN can keep the issue "alive" and on the agenda in an attempt to get more countries to adopt the Treaty resolutions, he said.

However, said Davinic, delegates should understand that non-signers do have legitimate concerns for not signing the Treaty. These concerns need to be addressed and member states must have "tolerance" for a step-by-step approach to get these countries to support the global ban on anti-personnel mines. UN member countries could provide technical and financial help to countries needing assistance to remove mines "provided they sign the Treaty", he suggested.

The Western Hemisphere as an Anti-personnel Mine-free Zone

Her Excellency Ambassador Marlene Villella de Talbott
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Honduras to the Organization of American States

The Organization of American States (OAS) is close to its goal of making the western hemisphere an anti-personnel mine-free zone by the year 2000, according to Ambassador de Talbott. Support from the international community was essential to accomplishing this, she said.

Recent history has placed Central America at the epicenter of competing ideologies between superpowers, she explained. Vast areas of land were mined; the cost was very high in economic and human terms.

In 1991, Honduras looked to the OAS to deal with the legacy of war, including removing landmines, many of which were unregistered and had been placed in inaccessible scrub land. The OAS, in turn, looked to the international community for technical expertise and to support such initiatives as observer missions and the formation of a security commission.

With Resolution 1299, the General Assembly of the OAS demonstrated its commitment to the problem and, in 1996 in Panama, the body called for the elimination of anti-personnel mines in the Americas and a moratorium on the production, use and transfer of anti-personnel mines. The following year the organization called for a binding agreement to prohibit the use of anti-personnel mines.

Ambassador de Talbott made special mention of the International American Defense Board for its role in training technicians and ensuring that security standards and procedures were adequate. This training, combined with accessible medical facilities, ensured there were few deaths and accidents during the demining program.

She said the demining initiative shows that millions have the courage and solidarity to meet the primary objective — the complete banning of anti-personnel mines.