

Landmines Update

Landmines: The Ottawa Convention Makes a Difference

"This is a win for the good guys," remarked Prime Minister Chrétien at a ceremony on March 1 at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), marking the day the treaty banning landmines became international law. The treaty, formally called the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, was signed in Ottawa in December 1997 by 122 countries. It has since been signed by another 13 countries and ratified by 67.

Now that the Ottawa Convention has entered into force, countries that have ratified it are legally bound by the terms of the treaty. They include a commitment to ban mine production and export, destroy mine stockpiles within 4 years, clear mined land within 10 years and help rehabilitate victims.



Montréal-based Mélanie Gagnon, one of Canada's Youth Mine Action Ambassadors

photo: DFAIT

Treaty signatories and other active partners will gather in Maputo, Mozambique, in May for the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention. Participants will assess progress and plan the next steps in the campaign against anti-personnel mines.

Youth Mine Action Ambassadors' Fund-Raiser: "Dance Without Fear"

Young Canadians are eager to contribute to the international anti-landmines campaign. To coincide with the March entry into force of the Ottawa Convention, they organized "Dance Without Fear," a nationwide effort to raise awareness of the global landmines crisis. At events across the nation, students danced to raise money for clearing mine-infested countries and helping victims and their families and communities. Some 350 young people attended a dance at Collège Villa Maria in Montréal — a great success according to organizer Mélanie Gagnon, one of Canada's Youth Mine Action Ambassadors. Similar events are being organized by Youth Ambassadors in Saint John, Ottawa, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

Gagnon says that being a Youth Ambassador has made a difference. "Since the launching of the program last September," she says, "I've met thousands of high school and university students who want to contribute to lasting change. Young people are profoundly moved by the devastation and human suffering caused by anti-personnel mines. They come to me asking how they can get involved, how they can help. Many are now actively engaged in letter-writing campaigns to countries that have not ratified the Convention, and are working on all kinds of educational and fund-raising projects to help rid the world of this scourge." ●

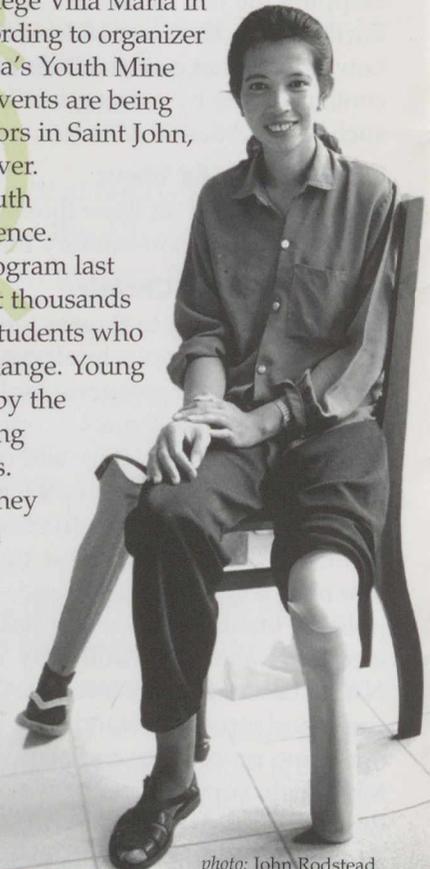


photo: John Rodstead



photo: DFAIT

» Ceremony marking the coming into force of the Ottawa Convention. From left to right: Robin Collins, Mines Action Canada; German Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer; Prime Minister Jean Chrétien; Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy; European Commission Vice-President Sir Leon Brittan; and Pierre Duplessis, Canadian Red Cross.

The Prime Minister noted that the speed with which the Convention came into force was unprecedented for a disarmament treaty.

Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy also participated in the ceremony, at which a bronze replica of the first page of the treaty was unveiled. Mr. Axworthy noted that the treaty is already making a difference, with Canada continuing to play a leadership role. New Mine action programs are under way in 25 countries, casualty rates in some regions are dropping significantly, over 14 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed, and even countries that haven't signed the treaty are feeling the pressure to implement many of the terms. For example, the United States, China and Russia have all implemented some form of unilateral export moratorium; the U.S. is a major financial contributor, and China has contributed to demining in Bosnia and plans to host a regional demining conference. Mr. Axworthy noted, however, that the commitment of the international community, non-governmental organizations and private donors must remain firm if the goals of the treaty are to be fulfilled.

To learn more about Canada's mine action efforts or to find out how you can help, visit our Web site:
www.mines.gc.ca