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ONE YEAR LATER: IS THE OTTAWA CONVENTION MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

On December 3, 1997, 122 states joined Canada in signing the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. That the Ottawa Convention was negotiated in less than one year and will enter into force faster than any disarmament Convention ever negotiated is a testament to the determination of the citizens of the world to address the humanitarian crisis caused by landmines. The Ottawa Convention is a major achievement, but it is just the beginning. In the words of Lloyd Axworthy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the "real test of success for the Ottawa Convention will be the degree to which it makes a difference in the lives of those who must live with the threat of landmines every day." The Ottawa Convention provides a legal framework for global mine action. It contains deadlines to destroy stockpiles of mines and clear mined areas, as well as obligations to assist mine victims. One year after the signature of the Ottawa Convention, the following report tries to answer the question: are we making a difference?

RATIFYING AND UNIVERSALIZING THE CONVENTION

The Ottawa Convention has now been signed by 133 countries and ratified by 55. Two-thirds of the world's nations have made the decision to ban this weapon.

The Ottawa Convention is establishing a new international norm against the use of anti-personnel mines. Even states which have yet to sign the Convention, such as Russia, China and the United States, have taken positive steps to bring an end to the global landmine crisis. The political will to assist in mine clearance is also growing rapidly.

One of the most important features of what has become known as the Ottawa Process was a high degree of co-operation between governments and civil society organizations supportive of the ban. This unique coalition remains strong. Over the past year governments and civil society organizations have hosted a range of regional conferences in Russia, Jordan, Thailand, Hungary and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to press for the early ratification and universalization of the Ottawa Convention. Each of these conferences has yielded concrete results – more ratifications, more signatories, increased public awareness of the landmine issue, and more pressure on the holdouts to join the ban.

With each new signature and ratification, another country assumes the responsibility of destroying mines on its own territory as well as supporting mine clearance and victim assistance in mine-affected states.

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