

Senator Patrick Leahy
United States of America

Sen. Leahy said that "tremendous force" will be needed if the goals of the Convention are to be reached. To that end, no one can slow down in their efforts. Governments must be made to disclose the locations of their mines, those both in the field and stockpiled at home, along with how many mines have been destroyed, under whose auspices and at what cost. Elected officials must ensure the existence and adherence to controls.

The role of Parliamentarians is to give voice to the moral issue and to create and oversee the initiatives. After meeting a child landmine victim in Honduras, he established a fund to provide prostheses for the victims. The fund, though large, could never meet the needs of the increasing number of victims and, as a result, he moved to legislative action.

He lobbied for and obtained support from members of both parties to ban the exporting of landmines. Senators with personal military experience were very supportive of this initiative, he added. In spite of Pentagon opposition, the measure passed. He noted that other countries, such as Italy, have taken similar action. In the US, it was the legislative, not the executive branch, that initiated Research and Development to advance demining technology, and that again it was those with military experience — people who "know reality" — who needed the least convincing.

Although there is still strong resistance, he is convinced that the US will sign the Convention. In the meantime, Parliamentarians must push for the rapid ratification of the Convention.

Discussion

The following is the discussion that occurred after the panel presentations.

- A delegate from France questioned, given the relative inactivity of his government about landmines, whether priority should be given to ratifying the Convention or to addressing national issues through laws. Sen. Leahy urged ratification. Cunningham agreed, but noted that the European Parliament's working group could bring pressure to bear on France. Mr. Occhetto pointed out that ratifying the Convention is not enough; it is specific legislation that makes sanctions possible and that compels the destruction of stockpiles of landmines.
- A participant questioned whether, in light of the fact that the cost of demining is considerably higher than mine building or placement, what kind of assistance could be obtained from countries that build mines. The participant also questioned the fundraising implications for these countries. The UN will be a leader in funding for demining, but it cannot be counted on to act alone, a panelist responded. Other countries propelled by "armies of humanity" will contribute funds to demining efforts along with their commitment not to lay additional mines. One local funding strategy may be to collect money for demining efforts in a manner similar to that used in Canada to collect money for UNICEF; enlisting children to raise money on Halloween or on some other holiday.

