



**The Ottawa Convention: The First Step Towards Humanitarian Demining
La Convention d'Ottawa pour l'interdiction des mines anti-personnel**

Agnès Marcaillou
Director

Royal Higher Defense Institute Colloquium
Brussels, 28 March 2013

Your Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense De Crem,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Reynders,
Colonel Faut, Director-general of the Royal Higher Institute for Defense

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

First, let me express my appreciation to the Government of Belgium for organizing and co-hosting the exhibition “Landmines: Treacherous Weapons”. Events like this keep mine action on the international agenda. They showcase the commitment of the international community and civil society to the vision that unites us this afternoon: the shared goal of a world free from the threat of landmines.

It is fitting that this colloquium should take place in Brussels: as we know, Belgium is a founding member of the United Nations. We are here to discuss a fundamentally People-centric issue, so it strikes me as apt that we do so in a state whose foreign policy has always focused on not just human security, but personal security.

The tireless efforts of states, the United Nations, civil society and individuals including HRH Princess Astrid, have made a meaningful difference around the globe. Tens of millions of anti-personnel mines have been destroyed, vast territories have been released for productive use, and countless lives are saved daily. Antipersonnel mines are widely recognized as indiscriminate weapons that have no place in the 21st century.

Simply put, the Ottawa Convention works. The results of mine clearance are immediate: I have personally seen how, just one day after a minefield is cleared, a community has already started to plant crops and build homes. South Sudan’s markets are bustling for the first time in 20 years because roads have been demined, paving the way for trade. In two weeks I will travel to the State of Palestine to witness the remarkable rapid response by UNMAS in Gaza. This Belgian-funded project has enabled post-conflict reconstruction, and assisted the people of Gaza to regain a sense of normalcy in the aftermath of recent conflicts. Palestine recently deposited its Article 7 request, and we look forward to working with the Palestinian Authority towards a goal of a mine-free State.

These successes must not belie the fact that much remains to be done. Landmines are an everyday reality for people in over 60 states, with tens of thousands of victims annually, and a real impact on countries' ability to recover after conflict. The ultimate aim of the Convention will only be attained once all entities – whether states or not – renounce the use of antipersonnel mines and engage in their total elimination. A single landmine – or even the fear of its presence – can hold an entire community hostage. Farmers cannot grow crops, refugees fear to return home, and parents live in the horrific knowledge that their children could be killed while they play.

It was this unacceptable reality which led to the creation of a Convention which, at its core, is about people. The Ottawa Convention was the first disarmament treaty driven by civil society. Its instigation did not play out behind closed doors. Citizens demanded that their governments take a stand against landmines and the Convention represents the commitment of the international community to address real threats and real needs.

As Director of UNMAS I can tell you that the needs and rights of People are at the core of UNMAS' work. UNMAS facilitates, coordinates and encourages mine action, while executing 17 field operations in the most mine-impacted countries. These include South Sudan and Somalia, the two most recent states to accede to the Convention. Primary responsibility for implementation lies with impacted states, and support from the international community, including South-South cooperation, has empowered countries and territories to take control of their landmine contamination and to build sustainable national capacities.

I am pleased to share with you the information that the Strategy of the United Nations of Mine Action was finalized in December, and will help the United Nations focus its resources and priorities in mine action around four major strategic objectives, and to respond to peoples' needs in a more structured and effective manner. The strength of the Strategy resides in the fact that it is the product of an intensive and inclusive consultative process involving all 14 members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action together with affected and donor countries, and civil society organisations. This document is the result of an impressive collaborative process, driven by the need to reaffirm the strong commitment of the Organisation to continue to save lives and create conditions conducive to sustainable peace, development and respect for human rights.

Royal Highness, Deputy Prime Ministers, Colonel, ladies and gentlemen. Afghanistan will soon be mine-free. This is a monumental step and one which will resonate with you all the more

having visited the exhibition and taken in the faces of Afghans whose lives have been fundamentally impacted by landmines. 3 weeks ago I visited the country, and was privileged to meet some of the 14,000 Afghan deminers who toil in unfathomable conditions to make their country safer. One of UNMAS' proudest achievements is that our technical assistance has been instrumental in ensuring that Afghanistan now has an Afghan-lead mine action programme, entirely staffed by Afghans whose technical skills are second to none, and who will lead their country to fulfill its Ottawa obligations within a decade. This UNMAS programme is rated by donors including the EU as amongst the best mine action programmes in the world. I must also pay tribute to the courageous Afghan women I met, whose work in implementing the Convention cannot be understated: in the most volatile parts of the country where the role of women is, at best, marginalized, female trainers take great risks to ensure that landmine safety messages reach women and girls. I find this to be a moving reminder that the spirit of Security Council Resolution 1325 on the role of women, peace and security lives and breathes across the globe.

Their work reminds us that it is our responsibility to ensure that marginalized voices are heard. Ottawa and subsequent treaties in particular the CRPD, have been instrumental in ensuring that the needs of victims are better understood and that treatment, rehabilitation and support for these groups are fully integrated into national health and social welfare structures. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navi Pillay, stated at the 12th meeting of Member States to the Mine Ban Convention that linking victim assistance to mine action and the CRPD has and will continue to make a significant contribution to improving the lives of victims and survivors of mine and ERW incidents, including their families and communities.

The mine ban treaty is an excellent example of the humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental benefits of an effective multilateral disarmament agreement, which strengthens the protection of all civilians against the effect of conventional weapons. The United Nations Secretary General has asserted on many occasions that a world free from the threat of mines and other explosive remnants of war is a safer world. Because mine action pertains to the work of the UN in peace and security, human rights and humanitarian affairs, it is an essential component of peace-building and a critical enabler of development. In countries such as Somalia and the DRC, conflict will only end if people are able to lift themselves from poverty.

The importance of Ottawa extends further than being a “first step towards humanitarian demining”: the people-centric spirit of the Convention has inspired revolutionary International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights instruments, including the CCM, the CCW and the CRPD. Its operational character can now be seen in the resolutions of the General Assembly on disarmament, with repeated calls for “practical measures” to mitigate the threat posed by unsecured weapons and ammunition. The management of conventional explosive weapons and

ammunition has received increased attention from the international community in view of the havoc that they inflict on peoples' daily lives, and increasingly with regards to the disastrous human impact of accidental explosions of government-owned unsafe weapons and ammunition storage facilities.

The scope of UNMAS work and "traditional" humanitarian demining has evolved from a focus on landmines and explosive remnants of war to incorporate weapons and ammunition management including small arms and light weapons. We speak increasingly about the broader concept of "removal of explosive hazards". In Libya, Katibas have asked UNMAS to help them store their weapons and ammunition. This too is a people-driven initiative which the mine action community must support in response to real threats and real needs.

However Libya also starkly demonstrates the grave consequences of unsecured ammunition, effectively transformed into an ammunition supermarket during and in the aftermath of the revolution, with a devastating impact on regional security. The current crisis in the Sahel clearly shows how weapons proliferation fuels insurgency, as illicitly-acquired ammunition is used for nefarious purposes including as the basis for IEDs. UNMAS operations in Mali, in addition to traditional humanitarian clearance, will include training the Malian Armed Forces to deal with this threat. I regard this to be a clear and natural progression from the Mine Ban Treaty, one which maintains a people-driven and people-centric core.

People will remain at the core of Mine Action: the UN will continue to deliver as One to ensure that lives are spared; that the needs, rights and dignity of survivors are protected and restored; and that security and stability will enable development.

I once again thank you for xxx and express my gratitude to *[XXX dignitaries]* and the Government of Belgium for organizing and co-hosting what is bound to be a fascinating event. And of course for I thank Belgium for its dedication in "staying the course" as we see the light at the end of the tunnel. I am reminded, Your Royal Highness, of your words during the Woman's Forum for Economy and Society in Deauville, October 2007. You spoke of how a network of people and institutions can bring about concrete results for the benefit of those who are in need. I leave you with my strong assertion that network of people represented in this room, and encompassing many millions more across the globe, has made the goal of a mine-free world a realistic possibility.

Thank you.

