

Landmine Treaty Members Meet

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Representatives of more than 100 countries that have ratified or signed the Ottawa Convention banning the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel landmines (APLs) met September 16-20 in Geneva. The United States, which has not signed the treaty, did not officially participate in the conference, although it attended public portions of the meeting.

During this annual meeting, the fourth since the accord entered into force March 1, 1999, states-parties took stock of the treaty's implementation as the four-year deadline for destroying all APL stockpiles draws nearer for countries that became states-parties in 1999. To date, 34 states-parties have fulfilled their stockpile destruction commitments, bringing the total number of states-parties that do not have APL stockpiles to 88. Another 22 are currently working toward their destruction commitments.

In addition to living up to their own obligations, meeting participants identified their other major objective as persuading as many countries to adhere to the treaty as possible. Ottawa members also explicitly urged nonstate actors for the first time to stop using landmines. German Ambassador Volker Heinsberg noted September 17 that of an estimated 230 million APLs worldwide about 90 percent are being used or stockpiled by governments and irregular forces outside the treaty.

Currently, 145 countries are states-parties or signatories to the accord, but some key countries have shied away, including the United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and several countries in the Near East.

The United States ended its role in negotiating the treaty in 1997 when countries rejected Washington's proposals for exempting U.S. APLs deployed on the Korean Peninsula and permitting the use of some mixed U.S. mine systems with both APL and anti-vehicle capabilities. But the Clinton administration announced the following year that it would join the treaty by 2006 if the United States could identify and field "suitable alternatives" to its mines outlawed by the treaty.

The Bush administration, however, initiated a review of U.S. landmine policy after taking office and has yet to finish it. A U.S. government official interviewed September 24 said the review is nearly complete, and findings could be announced imminently.

The next annual meeting of Ottawa Convention states-parties is scheduled to take place September 15-19, 2003, in Bangkok.

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