

U.S. Formally Ends Landmine Production

- [Arms Control Today](#)

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The U.S. government announced on June 27 that it will not produce or acquire anti-personnel landmines and that it intends to join the global Mine Ban Treaty at some point in the future, a stance that did not satisfy activists and officials pressing to rid the world of landmines.

The U.S. government is “diligently pursuing...solutions that would be compliant” with the treaty and “that would ultimately allow us to accede” to it, Douglas Griffiths, the U.S. ambassador to Mozambique, said in a statement delivered at a review conference for the treaty being held in Maputo. The parties to the treaty, which entered into force in 1999, hold these conferences every five years.

The week-long meeting was attended by more than 1,000 people from the treaty’s 161 parties and from international and nongovernmental organizations.

Supporters of the treaty voiced disappointment throughout the conference that the United States has yet to join the treaty, which President Barack Obama endorsed as a U.S. senator in 2007. Although U.S. officials told reporters that their review of U.S. landmine policy, which began five years ago, is not completed, the announced changes fell short of proponents’ hopes for U.S. accession to the treaty.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the most vocal proponent of the mine ban in Congress, called the policy changes “incremental but...significant.”

“The White House once and for all has put the United States on a path to join the treaty,” Leahy said in a June 27 statement. “An obvious next step is for the Pentagon to destroy its remaining stockpile of mines, which do not belong in the arsenal of civilized nations.”

Handicap International, which assists landmine victims in 33 countries, welcomed the change in U.S. policy in a June 27 statement, but said that, “without clear or immediate action deadlines, there is room for concern.”

The International Campaign to Ban Land Mines (ICBL) called the changes “a positive step,” but said the step “falls short of what is needed to ensure the weapons are never used again.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon criticized the United States and other holdouts in a June 24 statement that was delivered to the conference by Angela Kane, the UN high representative for disarmament affairs.

The goal of a world free of anti-personnel mines “has become an attainable reality,” Ban said in the statement. “But we cannot rest as long as anti-personnel mines continue to kill and maim. Some of the world’s largest countries with considerable stocks of anti-personnel landmines remain outside” the Mine Ban Treaty.

The office of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, said in a June 27 statement that Dempsey still considers landmines “a valuable tool in the arsenal of the United States” but that he supports the policy shift.

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“The chairman believes this decision on anti-personnel land mines, given our current stockpiles, protects current capabilities while we work towards a reliable and effective substitute,” the statement said.

The U.S. military has an active stockpile of slightly more than 3 million anti-personnel mines, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said at a June 27 briefing. The utility of the landmines will start to decline in about 10 years, and the mines will be “completely unusable” after 20 years, he said.

In his remarks in Maputo, Griffiths said the United States is “conducting a high[-]fidelity modeling and simulation effort to ascertain how to mitigate the risks associated with the loss” of anti-personnel mines.

The United States and 35 other countries are not party to the treaty, but most of them abide by its key provisions, according to the ICBL. The Geneva-based group said only five countries have used anti-personnel mines since 2009: Israel, Libya, Myanmar, Russia, and Syria.

The United States, which has not produced new landmines since 1997, is the world’s largest donor to efforts to reduce the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, with \$2.3 billion spent on mine action in the last two decades.

Declining Casualties

The treaty has dramatically reduced the number of people killed or maimed by landmines and explosive remnants of war, according to report released at the conference by the global watchdog Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor. In the first five years after the treaty and its provisions for clearing minefields entered into force, 31 countries reported 27,674 people were killed or wounded by landmines. Between 2009 and 2013, those countries reported 13,224 casualties, or less than half of the first five-year period.

In the past five years, Afghanistan had the most landmine casualties, followed by Cambodia and Colombia, according to the Monitor.

The study found that, since 1999, 48 percent of the victims of mines and explosive remnants of war have been children.

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