INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO BAN LANDMINES

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), launched in 1992 by Human Rights Watch and five other nongovernmental organizations, brought together over 1,400 human rights, humanitarian, children’s, peace, disability, veterans, medical, humanitarian mine action, development, arms control, religious, environmental, and women’s groups in over ninety countries who worked locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally to ban antipersonnel landmines. The ICBL was coordinated by an international committee of fourteen organizations, including Human Rights Watch, which remained one of the most active campaign members. The ICBL and its then coordinator Jody Williams (a member of the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Watch Arms Division) were jointly awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Progress toward the complete eradication of antipersonnel mines continued at an impressive pace, and the ICBL continued its intense global activity. Perhaps most notable were the further development of the ICBL’s groundbreaking Landmine Monitor system, and the ICBL’s extensive involvement in the intersessional work program of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

Campaign priorities were universalization of the Mine Ban Treaty—convincing recalcitrant nations to accede to the treaty—and ensuring effective implementation of the treaty. Particular targets were states of the former Soviet Union and the Middle East/North Africa, as well as the United States. Key issues of concern included: how to respond to violations of the ban treaty; antivehicle mines with antihandling devices which are prohibited by the treaty; joint military operations between States Parties and nonsignatories using mines; and continued stockpiling and transit of mines by nonsignatories in the territory of States Parties. Other priorities included: promoting increased funding for sustainable and appropriate mine action programs; promoting increased funding for comprehensive victim assistance programs and greater involvement of mine victims and mine-affected communities in the planning and implementation of such programs; and exploring ways to encourage non-state actors to commit to the banning of antipersonnel mines.

Four permanent working groups and one ad hoc working group of the ICBL led these efforts to address the various aspects of the humanitarian landmines crisis. They were the Treaty Working Group (chaired by Human Rights Watch), the Working Group on Victim Assistance, the Mine Action Working Group, and the Non-State Actors Working Group, as well as the adhoc Ethics and Justice Working Group.

Regional and thematic conferences were held to continue to build public awareness and further various aspects of the ban movement. Regional conferences, either held by ICBL members or where ICBL members participated, were held in Azerbaijan, Belarus (on stockpile destruction), Croatia, Egypt, Georgia, Malaysia, and Slovenia. National seminars or workshops were held in India, Iran, Japan, Nepal, Nigeria, and the U.S. As for thematic conferences, members of the ICBL held a follow-up conference in Germany to continue to develop the Bad Honnef concept of mine action and development, while others held a conference in Switzerland to engage non-state actors in the landmine ban.
New campaigners in countries including Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Chile, Iran, Nigeria, Poland, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Syria, and Togo began activities, as did a new group, Refugees Against Landmines, among Chechen refugees in Georgia; new work was also being carried out in Nagorno-Karabakh. The second anniversary of the opening for signature of the Mine Ban Treaty galvanized campaigners into action worldwide, as on December 3, 1999, activities were held around the globe, from theater and basketball games between disabled teams in Angola, to exhibits in South Korea and special hockey matches in the U.S. Similarly, the first anniversary of the entry into force of the treaty on March 1, 2000, further spurred action worldwide. A concerted ratification campaign included a coordinated letter-writing campaign with other partners, embassy visits, and various activities and media events in thirty-three countries around the world.

Additionally, ICBL members undertook a number of advocacy and awareness-building missions, including traveling to Kosovo, Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and Belgium (for the European Council and Parliament). The ICBL sent letters to heads of state and engaged in other advocacy activities on the occasions of international events such as the Francophone summit in Moncton, New Brunswick; the U.N. General Assembly in New York; the Special Summit of the European Council on the establishment of an area of Freedom, Security, and Justice in Finland; the Helsinki Summit of the European Union; the Organization of American States Summit; the Organization of African Unity Summit; the Inter-Parliamentary Union; and the Assembly of African Francophone Parliamentarians. Letters to heads of state were also sent on the occasions of the December 3 and March 1 anniversaries urging governments to accede to or ratify the treaty, destroy their stocks, submit their transparency report as required under the treaty’s article 7, and increase funding for mine action and victim assistance. The ICBL also issued regular action alerts.

The campaign committed to significant ICBL participation in the intersessional work program established in May 1999 at the First Meeting of States Parties. ICBL Working Groups took the lead in liaising with the five Standing Committees of Experts (SCEs). The intersessional work program was aimed at consolidating and concentrating global mine action efforts and highlighting the role of the Mine Ban Treaty as a comprehensive framework for mine action. The five SCEs served to facilitate the implementation of provisions of the Mine Ban Treaty, with extensive input, recommendations, and action points from NGOs. The five Standing Committees of Experts on Victim Assistance, Socio-economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness; Mine Clearance; Stockpile Destruction; Technologies for Mine Action; and the General Status and Operation of the Convention each met two times in the intersessional period between the first and second meetings of States Parties. The intersessional work proved to be an important mechanism to both spur and measure progress made in the full implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty. In September 2000 the Second Meeting of States Parties was held in Geneva, resulting in an extensive action program for the coming year.

Just prior to the Geneva meeting, the ICBL released the 1,100-page Landmine Monitor Report 2000, the second annual report to emerge from the Landmine Monitor system. The Landmine Monitor network grew to 115 researchers in ninety-five countries, and the system and the annual report were widely recognized as a crucial element in addressing the landmine crisis.

Between November 1999 and October 2000, the number of nations ratifying the Mine Ban Treaty grew from eighty-seven to 107, and a total of 139 countries had signed, ratified, or acceded to the treaty. But notable states such as the United States, Russia, and China continued to stay outside of the emerging international norm against the antipersonnel mine.