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## GLOBAL: A Nobel Laureate looks back on the first 10 years of the Mine Ban Treaty



Photo: ICBL 

Jody Williams, the founding coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)

JOHANNESBURG, 26 November 2009 (IRIN) - The ground-breaking [Mine Ban Treaty](#) (MBT), which came into force 10 years ago, will hold its [second five-year review conference](#) from 29 November to 4 December in the port city of Cartagena in northern Columbia.

The founding coordinator of the [International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#) (ICBL), Jody Williams, won the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for her organization's work, seen as an instigator of the MBT, after 1,300 civil society organizations in 95 countries mobilized to rid the world of anti-personnel mines.

From 1999-2004 she was a senior editor at the [Landmine Monitor Report](#), an oversight initiative by civil society, keeping a watchful eye on the implementation of the treaty and compliance with its terms.

Williams, along with fellow laureates Shirin Ebadi (Iran), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Rigoberta Mench   Tum (Guatemala), and Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire (Northern Ireland), launched the [Nobel Women's Initiative](#) in January 2006.

Williams serves as its chair.

Williams spoke to IRIN about the MBT, its successes, its influence on other initiatives, and what the world may have looked like without the MBT.


### Q: Has the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) fulfilled your expectations since it came into force?

**A:** What we have accomplished in the mine ban movement, and through the legal framework of the Mine Ban Treaty, is nothing short of amazing. When we started this effort I didn't really imagine a ban treaty in our immediate future, let alone as quickly as it was accomplished. The implementation of and compliance with the treaty has been fantastic.

Mines have been stigmatized and the norm has taken hold. Countries for the most part are doing what they are supposed to do - even many outside the treaty. A dozen formerly mined states have declared themselves to be mine-free; the number of new victims has fallen every year - the number of new victims has been cut by two-thirds.

Millions and millions of stockpiled mines have been destroyed and never will take a life or a limb. The broader impact of the mine ban movement - the model of civil society-government partnership, the reinforcement of the idea of 'citizen diplomacy', the inspiration we've given to activists around the world - is something I'd never thought about at all.



Photo: Guy Oliver/IRIN 

A landmine warning sign

### Q: What unforeseen difficulties has the MBT encountered in its first 10 years?

**A:** There are always things that could be better; work that could be further along than it is. There should be more mines out of the ground by now, and some governments are more than taking their time in getting the job done.

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There definitely should be much more effort on the part of governments to address the multiple issues facing landmine survivors in a consistent and comprehensive fashion, with a view to the long term. While providing medical care and prostheses, where appropriate, is critical, it really is just the beginning of meeting the needs of landmine survivors.

**Q: Has the vigour that first greeted the MBT started to wane?**

**A:** I've been rather surprised by the vitality that still pervades the movement to ban landmines - whether it be the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, or the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#), or UN Agencies that work on the issue, or governments that are part of the treaty.

I guess there is some degree of waning involvement, but I'd credit that mostly to the fact that there has been remarkable implementation of, and compliance with, the MBT.

**Q: The MBT was negotiated outside of the UN process; what was lost or gained by taking this path?**

**A:** In the case of the MBT, I have to say that in my opinion nothing was lost and everything was gained by negotiating the MBT outside the UN. The final treaty emerged from the negotiating process stronger than when negotiations started - essentially impossible inside the UN process, where reaching consensus, and therefore generally the lowest common denominator - is the rule.

“ We lost dictatorship-by-consensus inside the UN, and gained a treaty that really deals with the landmine problem ”

All one has to do to confirm that is look at Amended Protocol II - the Landmine Protocol - of the [Convention on Conventional Weapons](#) (CCW). In fact, when we launched the ICBL in late 1992, we pressured states to hold a review conference of the CCW, with the goal of amending Protocol II to ban landmines rather than simply - and very badly - attempting to regulate their use.

We failed miserably within the UN and with the CCW. It can be argued that [Amended Protocol II](#) is even weaker than the original Protocol, but out of that failure came the impetus to really come together and negotiate the MBT, through what became known as the Ottawa Process.

And the Secretary-General is the depository for the MBT, thus bringing the treaty back into the UN. We lost dictatorship-by-consensus inside the UN, and gained a treaty that really deals with the landmine problem through the Ottawa Process.

**Q: What precedent did civil society's role in the MBT set for future international treaties? Did it change the face, method and outcomes of such international negotiations?**

**A:** As much as many governments still do not particularly like having to deal with civil society, the government-civil society partnership that was forged by the mine ban movement has had a big impact on civil society's role, and in treaty negotiations.

The model has been used in banning cluster munitions, in the work bringing about the treaty on the rights of the disabled, the protocol on child soldiers, the treaty on the International Criminal Court, and in ongoing post-treaty work dealing with landmines and cluster munitions - to name just a few.

Globalization has not only affected corporations, it has opened the world to civil society organizing, and increased our ability to see the goals and aspirations of people around the world elevated and listened to in ways that did not seem possible previously. If governments actually responded to the views of their citizens when negotiating treaties, we'd be able to turn our attention to other issues.

As long as they don't, civil society will have a role to play in addressing our common problems. The successes of the ICBL and the Cluster Munition Coalition have demonstrated that it can be done, and have inspired people everywhere to recognize their ability to come together with others and help change the world.

**Q: When the campaign to ban cluster munitions started it was thought 'unrealistic'. What did you think your chances were?**

**A:** Actually, before the launch of the ICBL some of the founding NGOs and individuals did not call for a ban on landmines; some only called for better restrictions. It is just part of the process - the outcome is what matters. In both cases - the mine ban and the cluster munition ban movements - the pressure by civil society resulted in treaties banning the weapons. I'd have to say, 'Awesome achievements!'

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**Q: There are powerful states not party to the MBT: China, Russia and the USA. Has their exclusion compromised the MBT, or has it shown up these countries for being on the wrong side of history?**

**A:** Of the countries you name - China, Russia and the US - each has its own reasons for not yet joining the treaty. Also, while each of these countries still remains on the wrong side of history, each has taken steps that are reflective of the global stigmatization of the weapon.



Photo: Guy Oliver/IRIN

A female deminer working for the HALO Trust

Neither Russia nor China export landmines anymore; China has provided assistance for mine clearance. In fact, the only country that we have been able to document as consistently using landmines, is Burma.

The norm has taken hold. In the case of the US, under the Obama administration we had been more hopeful of movement by the US toward joining the treaty than during the previous administration.

Unfortunately, our hopes have been completely in vain, despite the fact that the US has actually been in virtual compliance with the MBT since before it entered into force.

On Tuesday 24 November it was revealed that President Obama had decided to continue the [former President George] Bush landmine policy and not join the Mine Ban Treaty. It is hard to imagine, especially given the foreign policy goals of the President, how remaining outside of the treaty can be justified under the circumstances.

**Q: Demining seems to be going well, but can this be said for victim assistance?**

**A:** As I said before, where governments have fallen way behind is in addressing the multiple [needs of landmine survivors](#). While there are significantly fewer new survivors every year as a result of successes of the mine ban movement, the needs of most are still not adequately being addressed.

I noted that while providing medical care and prostheses, where appropriate, is critical, it really is just the beginning of meeting the needs of landmine survivors. Their needs are complex and not easy to address, but without a meaningful commitment by governments it becomes harder still. The amount of resources put into assistance to landmine survivors does not begin to compare with the commitment to mine clearance.

**Q: If the MBT did not come into effect, how would the world look today?**

**A:** I think it's pretty clear that if there were no Mine Ban Treaty the world would look very different - in every area related to landmines as well as in a broader sense. When we started this movement, there were mines going into the ground in huge numbers, and very few were coming out. The number of new mine victims each year was going up.

Without our movement, mines would continue to be used; new types developed, produced and traded; they'd be stockpiled. Instead of a world with millions of stockpiled mines destroyed, and therefore unable to be used and wreak more chaos, there would be millions more new mines in stockpiles. There'd be more new victims every year and more new minefields around the world. Instead, we are conquering the landmine problem.

Also, there would be no Landmine Monitor - the genius breakthrough system of civil society monitoring of a treaty, which is being studied and serves as a model for other efforts to monitor treaties.

In a broader sense, 'citizen diplomacy' would likely not be as prominent as it is today. 'Ordinary citizens' might not feel as empowered to try and tackle some of the world's problems. There likely would not be a [Cluster Munition Convention](#). And the list goes on. We have changed the world for the better. What more could one ask for in a lifetime?



Photo: Guy Oliver/IRIN

A HALO Trust instructor teaches new recruits about landmines

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