

## Fight against threat from anti-personnel mines continues 20 years after adoption of Ottawa Treaty

Montreal, 18 September 2017. Two decades ago, the text of the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty was adopted marking an unprecedented diplomatic victory against these cowardly weapons. Opened for signature in Ottawa on December 3, 1997, the treaty led to a fall in casualty numbers, the destruction of millions of mines and a virtual end to their use. Since 2014, however, the use of mines has increased in many current conflicts, with a resulting rise in casualty numbers. The anniversary of the text of the Ottawa Treaty is an opportunity to remind States of the need to remain mobilised in the fight against mines in order to bring a permanent end to their use. They also need to ensure that funding to eradicate them is equal to the work that remains to be done and that victims are not forgotten.

The final text of the Ottawa Treaty was adopted on 18 September 1997 on the initiative of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) of which Handicap International (HI) is a founding member, and then Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy. It bans **the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of anti-personnel mines and places an obligation on countries to assist victims**. A major victory for the States and organisations involved, it was the world's first treaty to ban a conventional weapon. It was opened for signature on 3 and 4 December 1997 in Ottawa and entered into force on 1 March 1999.

*"Mines still present in 63 countries and territories continue to kill and maim. Almost every hour, a new casualty of these weapons is reported somewhere in the world,"* says Jérôme Bobin, Executive Director for Handicap International (HI) Canada. *"More than three quarters of these casualties are civilians, and a third are children. The use of mines and improvised explosive devices acting as mines increased in 2015. Although clear advances have been made in the fight against mines, our struggle is not over yet. We need to remain vigilant against these weapons and must continue to mobilise States to rid the planet of this scourge and to provide assistance to casualties over the long-term."*

The Ottawa Treaty has enjoyed 20 years of undoubted success. There are currently **162 States Parties**, representing more than 80% of the world's countries; **28 States and one territory have completed their mine clearance programmes** since the Treaty entered into force in 1999; at least **2,200 sq.m. of mined land has been cleared**, equivalent to nearly twice the size of London; **51 million mines stockpiled by States have been destroyed**. The use of anti-personnel mines is now widely stigmatised across the world.

After the treaty entered into force in 1999, there was an initial tenfold reduction in the annual number of casualties from at least **30,000 casualties** in the early 1990s to **3,353** in 2013. The vast majority of casualties of anti-personnel mines are civilians (78% in 2015).

However, since 2014, the number of casualties has **increased after 15 years of steady decline**. The 2016 Landmine Monitor report, which measures the impact of the Ottawa Treaty, reveals that the number of new casualties of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war **almost doubled** between 2014 and 2015 to at least **6,461 people** killed or injured by these weapons in 2015, compared to **3,695** in 2014, an increase of 75%. This is **the largest number of casualties reported by the Landmine Monitor since 2006**.

**This is due to the particularly large number of casualties in conflict zones in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. In 2015, these countries reported** the majority of new victims of anti-personnel mines - factory-made or improvised – and explosive remnants of war: Afghanistan (1,310), Libya (1,004), Yemen (988), Syria (864) and Ukraine (589). **These five countries alone represented 74% of casualties reported in 2015.**

**The Monitor also recorded the highest number of casualties of improvised mines** (explosive devices produced by belligerent parties acting as anti-personnel mines) **since the publication of the first annual report in 2000**, with 1,331 casualties or **21% of casualties reported in 2015**. The actual number of casualties is likely to be higher.

### **“Stop Bombing Civilians”, HI’s new international campaign**

To coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Ottawa Treaty, Handicap International (HI) launched on September 12 a grassroots campaign to [“Stop Bombing Civilians”](#) - a common practice in present-day conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other countries. Ninety-two percent of people killed and injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians. The organisation is calling on the public to support its campaign to end this unacceptable practice with the aim of pressuring States to join and support a political declaration banning the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

### **About Handicap International (HI)**

Handicap International (HI) is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 35 years. Working alongside persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions, and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Since it was founded in 1982, Handicap International (HI) has set up development programmes in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. The network of eight national associations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) works constantly to mobilise resources, jointly manage projects and to increase the impact of the organisation’s principles and actions. Handicap International (HI) is one of six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and the winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. Handicap International (HI) takes action and campaigns in places where “living in dignity” is no easy task.

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**For more information :** [www.handicap-international.ca](http://www.handicap-international.ca)

#### **Press contact :**

Gabriel Karasz-Perriau  
Communication Officer  
Handicap International – Canada  
(514) 908-2813 # 229  
[gabriel.perriau@handicap-international.ca](mailto:gabriel.perriau@handicap-international.ca)