

International Mine Awareness Day: Sebastian Kurz Pushes For a Mine-Free World

Thousands of people were killed or wounded in mine explosions last year alone, illustrating the urgent need for a mine-free world. Today's International Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action Day remembers the victims and aims to call on the International Community to continue the efforts for an eradication of anti-personnel mines. "Each year, anti-personnel mines kill hundreds of people around the world, leaving thousands injured. 20 years ago, Austria was among the initiators of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty, but while much has been achieved, more remains to do.

As Austria holds the Presidency of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty in 2017, I call on our international partners to put more focus on this important humanitarian issue. We remain fully committed to the implementation and will continue to strive for universality of the convention," Foreign Minister Kurz said in a statement today. "Austria has, for a long time, considered the fight against anti-personnel mines as one of our foreign policy priorities. Since 2000, we have given 25 million euro for mine action, supporting projects in Bosnia, Iraq, Libya, Mozambique and many other states.

We are particularly engaged in ensuring long-time facilitation of victim assistance. Today, we stand in solidarity with the victims and their families, taking this day as a reminder to never stop pushing for our goal of a mine free world." The "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction", informally known as "Ottawa Treaty", opened for signature on 3 December 1997 and entered into force on 1 March 1999. For the first time, a legally binding disarmament instrument went beyond the mere restriction of means and methods of warfare by putting additional explicit focus on the protection and support of civilians and victims.

Austria was part of the core group of States, working in close coordination with civil society, ICRC and UN to elaborate the Convention. Today, the Treaty counts 162 state parties, 157 States Parties have disposed of their stockpiles, 51 million landmines have been destroyed so far, 2.1 million in 2015 alone, vast areas of land have been cleared of mines and reclaimed for use. Austria holds the Presidency of the Convention for the 20th year of its existence and will host a Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention in Vienna from 18 to 22 December. The number of casualties from mines, victim-activated improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war has been successfully reduced from 9,220 in 1999 to 3,965 in 2014. However, many challenges still lie ahead:

A strong rise in numbers was, for instance, recorded in 2015 with 6,461 people being killed or injured, mainly due to warfare in Syria, Afghanistan or Libya. While the use of mines by States has become a relatively rare phenomenon, non-state armed groups still lay these heinous weapons. On 8 December 2005, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 4 April to be officially observed as International Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action Day.

The efforts of the work against landmines have also been recognised by the Nobel Prize Committee, who awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Jody Williams and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) in 1997.