

April 4, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We were pleased when your administration announced in November 2009 that it was conducting a review of U.S. policy on landmines. We have appreciated the thoroughness with which the review has apparently been conducted, although we have been dismayed at the lengthy period of time involved. It is our understanding that the inter-agency deliberations have now concluded and the decision-making point has been reached.

We write now to encourage you strongly to make a decision on future U.S. landmine policy as soon as possible, and to announce that the United States will accede to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. This is a crucial humanitarian decision that should not be put off any longer, or postponed during a busy election year. We urge you to submit the treaty to the Senate this year for its advice and consent next year.

Since the policy review began, the administration has received letters of support for the Mine Ban Treaty from 68 Senators, 16 Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, key NATO allies, retired senior military personnel, dozens of NGO leaders, victims of U.S. landmines, and countless concerned Americans. In total, 159 countries are party to the treaty, which comprehensively bans antipersonnel mines. Every other member of NATO supports the treaty, as does every member of the European Union, and other key allies such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

A decision to join the Mine Ban Treaty would vividly demonstrate your commitment to multilateralism, to global humanitarian endeavors, and to the protection of civilians from the ravages of war. It is a decision that would be lauded by the vast majority of the U.S. public and U.S. allies around the world.

Such a decision would also be consistent with the U.S.'s generous support for mine clearance programs around the world—a generosity that for years has been undercut by the U.S.'s insistence that it may use landmines.

In fact, the U.S. has not used antipersonnel landmines since 1991, has not exported them since 1992 and has not produced them since 1997. Surely if the U.S. military has been able to defend the country for the last 21 years without using antipersonnel landmines, it can do so in the future as well.

It is little known that the U.S. has already banned the use of all “persistent” or “dumb” mines (the typical type planted in the ground), as of last year, even in Korea. It is now time to ban “non-persistent” or “smart” antipersonnel mines as well. Nearly all U.S. allies have already banned these mines as indiscriminate weapons, and thus the U.S. would not be able to use them in coalition operations.

U.S. participation is also important to the universalization of the treaty. Even though landmine use has been significantly reduced worldwide, a few countries refuse to join—and even continue to use landmines—under the cover that they will not join if the U.S. has not joined. Past and ongoing deployment of these weapons by state armies and non-state groups continues to undermine stability and development, exacerbate human suffering, and burden many of the world’s weak and failing states.

The last steps to acceding to the treaty are now achievable, and vitally important to United States efforts to protect civilians during and after armed conflict, strengthen international norms, isolate irresponsible regimes, and fulfill promises to the international community. We add our voice to the myriad American citizens, landmine survivors, international allies, and campaigners from every corner of the globe in calling on your administration to finally join the Mine Ban Treaty now.

Sincerely,