



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Ettore Balestrero, Apostolic Nuncio
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations
and Other International Organizations in Geneva, Head of Delegation to the
21st Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention
Geneva, 24 November 2023

Mr. President,

As this is the first time that my Delegation is taking the floor during the current meeting, allow me to express the Holy See's appreciation for the intense preparatory work that you and your team have undertaken to ensure a successful Meeting of States Parties.

Just a few days ago, Pope Francis invited all people of good will to reflect on the number of children who "are deprived of the fundamental right to life and to physical and mental integrity due to conflicts", asking "How many children are forced to take part, directly or indirectly, in fighting, and bear the scars? No war is worth the tears of children!"¹.

Regrettably, anti-personnel landmines and victim-activated explosive devices continue to be used by some States and armed groups, provoking a tragic number of victims, including many children. With great concern, we observe the indiscriminate spread of anti-personnel mines in Ukraine. It is a tragic example of how these instruments of death are also preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid and hampering agricultural activities, posing a constant threat to the civil population.

The use of these treacherous weapons embodies a very dangerous and artificial approach to security, in which anyone in the other camp is simply seen as an "enemy". In particular, the continued reliance on landmines is a symptom of wider and deeper problems. Yet the most effective response to such problems should not be weapons, but first and foremost dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation.

Indeed, every person seeks peace; but true peace and security can never be based on fear, which tends to undermine peace in the long run, even in the absence of conflict. Conflicts disfigure the bonds between people and between States, with civilians always bearing the brunt of the suffering.² For these reasons, the Holy See strongly urges all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention, and in the meantime, to cease the production and use of landmines.

Mr. President,

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis acknowledges that one of "the current challenge is to reconfigure and recreate multilateralism, taking into account the

¹ Pope Francis, Message on "X" on the occasion of the World Children's Day, 20 November 2023.

² Cf. Pope Francis, Message to the President of the Fourth Review Conference of the Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines, Oslo, 29 November 2019.

new world situation”³. In this regard, he commends the work carried out by “many groups and organizations within civil society [that] help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community”, specifically heralding “the Ottawa Process against the use, production and manufacture of antipersonnel mines [as] one example [...]”⁴.

Mr. President,

When we consider the importance of this Convention from the perspective of the victims, we realize that respecting the agreed deadlines means much more than fulfilling legal obligations; it is rather a fundamental way of honoring their dignity. In this spirit, legal obligations must be fulfilled with renewed urgency and perseverance, through sincere cooperation and solidarity.

The destruction of stockpiles and the clearance of landmines must continue to go hand in hand with assistance to victims, in a truly holistic and preventive approach. In this regard, the Holy See wishes to reiterate its gratitude to the many volunteers, to the United Nations personnel and to all engaged in the dangerous work of mine clearing and in assisting those who have experienced injury and death of loved ones from landmines.⁵ Their work is a concrete response to our universal call to be peacemakers, while caring for our brothers and sisters.

Mr. President,

The special attention given to victims is of paramount importance and must continue even after the destruction of stockpiles and landmine clearance. Regrettably, as it has been said time and time again, a world free of landmines is not a world free from victims. Therefore, the Holy See reaffirms that it is needed to continue placing the human person at the center, thus ensuring an integral form of assistance that takes into account the multiple needs of victims. In this perspective, spiritual care should accompany medical, psychological, and economic-social assistance, as an important component of such the integral care of the human person.

The Holy See was one of the first States to sign the Convention. Since then, the Holy See, through the institutions of the Catholic Church throughout the world, has conducted “a campaign to increase awareness in the local Churches of the problem of anti-personnel landmines, circulating relevant information on this serious problem, pressing for an active commitment in this regard and, in addition, asking for prayers for the victims of anti-personnel landmines”⁶.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize that the Holy See is deeply convinced that in today’s globalized world we should invest in instruments of life and peace, rather than in instruments of death and indiscriminate and unnecessary suffering. In the same vein, I would like to underline that we cannot accept that enormous resources and technological research are allocated to the development of ever more lethal weapons and not to making prosthesis more adaptable and affordable for victims. Thank you, Mr. President.

³ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation “*Laudate Deum*”, §37.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf. Pope Francis, Message on the occasion of the 2021 International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, 4 April 2021.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, Message to the 1st Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Nairobi, November 2004.