

Geneva, 16 January 2025

H.E. Mr. Petteri Orpo
Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland
Office of the Prime Minister
Finland
Via: petteri.orpo@gov.fi, tuomas.tikkanen@gov.fi

Re: Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention – urgent meeting request

Dear Prime Minister Orpo,

I am writing on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), a global civil society network working for a world free of mines, and co-laureate of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, to express our deep concern over Finland's consideration of a withdrawal from the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC). In addition to our messages below, I would like to also respectfully request a meeting with you and other decision-makers on this matter at your earliest convenience.

We understand that the use of antipersonnel landmines and withdrawal of membership from the Convention are part of the current military preparedness assessment being undertaken by the Finnish Ministry of Defense. We certainly recognize the need for Finland to take all necessary measures to ensure a robust defense in light of the current security situation. But we strongly believe that antipersonnel mines should never be part of any modern military's arsenal, and we urge you in the strongest possible terms to remain committed to the Mine Ban Convention and its humanitarian principles. Our arguments stem from a deep concern for the well-being of Finnish civilians, who are at greatest risk from the use of mines on Finnish territory, as well as for the countless civilians globally that would suffer from any decision to further erode the fabric of international humanitarian law and a rules-based international order.

As you are aware, anti-personnel landmines are inherently indiscriminate weapons that violate the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. They cannot distinguish between combatants and civilians and remain active for decades, causing devastation long after conflicts have ended. They are also inhumane, causing abhorrent injuries to the human body that almost always cause lifelong disability, if not death. Over the years, these mines have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent men, women, and children, while injuring and maiming countless more, perpetuating cycles of poverty, fear, and instability.

On these grounds, antipersonnel mines were banned by the 1997 Mine Ban Convention, which remains a cornerstone of the global efforts to address the humanitarian harm caused by anti-personnel mines. As one of the most successful instruments of international humanitarian law, the Mine Ban Convention has set the gold standard for humanitarian disarmament and has since served as a model for similar conventions.

By joining the AP Mine Ban Convention in 2012, Finland aligned itself with 163 other states committed to ending the use of these inhumane weapons and demonstrated laudable support for these shared goals. Around that time, the Finnish Minister of Defence stated that landmines are no longer required to protect the Finnish border with Russia, adding that "the nature of warfare has changed rather a lot, and weapon systems have changed. The replacement system will match today's demands much better." Indeed, we understand a significant amount of money was invested in alternative systems to defend Finland without putting Finnish lives at risk.

It is worth noting that all members of the European Union, as well as all NATO members except the United States, are party to the Convention. The United States has not used mines since 1991, and current

policy forbids use outside the Korean peninsula. The only governments currently using AP mines are Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, and Russia, and we imagine that Finland would not choose to align itself with the military values of those countries.

Indeed, in the late 1990s, most militaries were convinced that any marginal military utility from AP mines was far outweighed by the risk they posed to civilians and their own soldiers. A 1997 ICRC study entitled Friend of Foe: A study of the military use and effectiveness of anti-personnel mines noted “Establishing, monitoring and maintaining an extensive border minefield is time-consuming, expensive and dangerous. In order to have any efficacy at all they need to be under continuous observation and direct fire, which is not always possible. Because of these practical difficulties some armed forces have entirely refrained from using such minefields. Moreover, these minefields have not proved successful in preventing infiltration.” This conclusion, among others in the study strongly supporting a ban on AP mines, was endorsed by a group of senior military experts in 1996.

A decision to withdraw from the Convention would therefore represent a reversal of Finland’s principled stance and a setback for global disarmament and humanitarian efforts. Moreover, it would raise significant questions about Finland’s commitment to multilateral agreements and international humanitarian law, potentially undermining its credibility as a responsible member of the international community. Furthermore, Finland’s role as a leader in humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping efforts would be severely undermined. These roles are incompatible with any endorsement of a weapon that continues to cause indiscriminate harm to civilians, violating fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, as well as EU’s core values and commitments.

A withdrawal could also signal Finland’s lack of confidence in the security provided by NATO membership. And as Mine Ban Convention States Parties are prohibited from using or assisting, encouraging or inducing, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party, any planned use of AP mines by Finland could create challenges for its allies in the context of a joint operation. Withdrawal from the APMBC would not only tarnish Finland’s reputation but could also embolden other states or non-state actors to challenge the norms established by the Convention, undermining decades of progress in stigmatizing the use of anti-personnel mines.

In closing, we urge you and the Government of Finland to reject any contemplation of withdrawal from the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. Such a step would have profound humanitarian, ethical, and reputational consequences. The decision to stay in the Convention, on the other hand, would affirm Finland’s dedication to protecting lives, upholding international law, and maintaining its leadership in disarmament efforts.

Please note similar letters have been also sent to the President of Finland, Minister of Defence, and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The ICBL remains ready to work together with Finland in the framework of the APMBC, and we hope to continue to count on Finland as a steadfast partner in our pursuit of a mine-free world.

Yours sincerely,



Tamar Gabelnick

CC: H.E. Ms. Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations in Geneva
Ms. Laura Lodenius, Peace Union of Finland