

MEDIA PACK

LITHUANIA: Antipersonnel Mines & the Urgent Call to Remain in the Mine Ban Convention

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Landmines Kill Children, Not Invaders – Nobel Peace Laureate Warns Lithuania *Civil Society Watchdog in Vilnius on 1 April to press government to stay in the Mine Ban Treaty*

GENEVA – The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), 1997 Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate is travelling to **Vilnius on 1 April for urgent talks with Lithuanian leaders**, warning that a proposed withdrawal from the **Mine Ban Convention** would endanger civilians—especially children.

The high-stakes visit by humanitarian disarmament and technical experts comes just days after a [joint statement by the defense ministers of Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and Estonia on 18 March](#), suggesting coordinated withdrawal from the 1997 treaty banning antipersonnel landmines, citing national security concerns. ICBL has urged immediate dialogue with civil society and humanitarian experts before pursuing further steps toward antipersonnel mine use. During the April visit, the organization will be speaking with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defense, as well as the Seimas. **ICBL regrets the offices of the President and Prime Minister did not choose to engage with civil society on this crucial matter and urges them to reconsider.**

Antipersonnel landmines are not just primitive, outdated weapons—they are humanitarian disasters in waiting. These devices cannot tell the difference between a soldier’s boot and a child’s step. They lie buried for decades, waiting to explode. According to the [Landmine Monitor Report 2024](#), every year antipersonnel mines still kill or maim thousands of people—85% of victims are civilians, and 40% of them are children. “Landmines turn farmlands into death traps, fields into no-go zones, and childhoods into lifetimes of disability. Their cruelty is quiet, hidden, and permanent,” explains **Tamar Gabelnick**, Director of ICBL.

“The ICBL fully understands the need to strengthen national defense, especially given the current geopolitical climate,” said **Gabelnick**. *“But choosing antipersonnel mines would be a step in the wrong direction—morally, strategically, and reputationally. These weapons offer only a false sense of security for too high a price—paid by Lithuanian civilians, children, soldiers, and by Lithuania’s international reputation. Lithuania must invest in modern,*

effective defense that would keep the people safe—not in tools of indiscriminate destruction that violate international law.”

“To lay mines on your own land is not a show of strength—it is an act of desperation and a form of self-sabotage,” said **Per Nergaard**, of Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), an ICBL member organization. *“It endangers your own people and environment for decades. It is a major step backwards for military strategy.”*

Lithuania signed the Mine Ban Convention in 1999, ratified it in 2003, and completed the destruction of its Soviet-era antipersonnel mine stockpile by 2016. Unlike some states, Lithuania never produced these banned weapons and had long been recognized as a responsible advocate for humanitarian disarmament.

Lithuania’s proposal to leave the Mine Ban Convention follows its official withdrawal from the Convention on Cluster Munitions on 6 March 2025, the first time a country has left a convention banning a class of weapons. Lithuania’s decision was met by ardent international criticism due to the indiscriminate nature of cluster munitions and the danger this step posed to the fundamental underpinnings of international humanitarian law – the need to protect civilians both in times of peace and, especially, in times of insecurity or armed conflict.

Upholding the Convention Even When Others Don’t

Some argue that the Mine Ban Convention is weakened because several countries, including Russia, remain outside it and continue to use banned antipersonnel mines. According to the [Landmine Monitor 2024](#) the only governments known to use antipersonnel mines as of 2023 were **Russia, Myanmar, North Korea, and Iran**.

Lithuania’s international reputation would be irreparably tarnished by copying practices used by countries that have shown little concern for protecting civilians in conflict, warns ICBL. Abandoning the Convention does not punish perpetrators; on the contrary, it plays into the hands of those seeking to weaken global norms and the rule of law. Antipersonnel mines neither deter nor effectively defend against Russian aggression. Instead, such a move would only endanger Lithuanian civilians, particularly children, by placing hidden killers around Lithuanian territory and playing Russian roulette with their lives.

“We don’t uphold international law only when others do—we uphold it regardless, or even because others don’t,” argues Gabelnick. *“Would Lithuania consider walking out of the Geneva Conventions because a handful of other countries, such as Russia, continue violating them?”* she asks. *“Safeguarding international humanitarian law and remaining in the Convention is not a sign of weakness. It’s leadership. It’s what separates Lithuania from the violators of humanitarian norms. If Lithuania walks away from this treaty, it aligns not with those defending international norms—but with those that trample them.”*

Security Cannot Come at the Expense of Humanity

The ICBL acknowledges Lithuania and its neighbors’ legitimate security concerns.

“There are very rational fears at this moment—but reintroducing antipersonnel mines is an irrational response. It will not keep Lithuania and its people safe—just as it did not keep

*Bosnia and our people safe,” said **Zoran Ješić**, who lost a leg to a landmine in Bosnia and now leads UDAS, a Bosnian organization representing landmine survivors.*

“Lithuania withdrew from the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Now it seeks to abandon the Mine Ban Treaty. What’s next—the Chemical or Biological Weapons Conventions? All these weapons, including antipersonnel mines, are banned for the same reason: they inflict unimaginable suffering on innocent people. They are inhumane, indiscriminate, and their deadly legacy lingers long after wars end,” Ješić concluded.

ICBL Calls for Leadership, Not Regression

The ICBL urges Lithuania to reject this banned weapon, remain in the Convention, and promote it in the region and globally.

*“We call on Prime Minister **Paluckas** and his government to meet with us—experts and civil society next week,” said **Gabelnick**. “We call on Lithuania to keep its commitment to protect civilians at all times, on sunny and rainy days. It is never too late to do the right thing: Stand by the rule of law. Stand for civilians. Stand firmly against landmines.”*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Why the World Banned Antipersonnel Mines

- **Illegal:** Violate international humanitarian law—cannot distinguish between combatant and civilian.
- **Civilians = Main Victims:** 85% of victims are civilians. 40% are children.
- **Enduring Harm:** Mines stay active for decades, long after wars end.
- **Limited Military Value:** Far outweighed by their humanitarian consequences.

About the Mine Ban Convention

- Adopted in 1997, also known as the Ottawa Treaty
- Bans use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of antipersonnel mines
- Built through unprecedented partnership between states, civil society (ICBL), ICRC, and UN
- Championed by Princess Diana, whose 1997 visit to Angola and Bosnia galvanized public support
- 165 countries are onboard, including every EU and NATO member except the U.S.
- Led to a dramatic reduction in global landmine casualties, production, transfer, and use; advanced clearance of mined areas (30 countries became mine-free), and increased support for landmine victims
- **Current users:** Russia, Myanmar, North Korea, Iran

Additional Quotes for Media Use

“Lithuania should not endanger its people with hidden killers. Bring back landmines, and we bring back suffering, fear, and loss.”

—Tamar Gabelnick, *Director, ICBL*

“To me, as a victim of an antipersonnel mine, whose life was shattered forever from a mine—to consider producing or using antipersonnel mines again, and in Europe, is both incomprehensible and shocking.”

— *Zoran Ješić, Landmine Survivor, UDAS, ICBL*

“Withdrawing from the Mine Ban Convention aligns Lithuania with global violators—not defenders—of humanitarian law.”

— *Tamar Gabelnick, Director, ICBL*

“Security must not come at the expense of humanity. Landmines are NOT modern defense tools. They are relics of the past that put human security at risk.”

— *Per Nergaard, Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), ICBL*

“The ICBL has worked closely with Lithuanian officials in the past to uphold the Convention globally. Today we call on the Lithuanian current government to recommit, not retreat.”

— *Tamar Gabelnick, Director, ICBL*

About the ICBL

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is a global coalition of hundreds of NGOs working around the world to eliminate antipersonnel landmines. Founded in 1992, the ICBL was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for its role in achieving the Mine Ban Convention. ICBL is also named in the preamble of the Convention in recognition of its role.

Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, ICBL works with landmine survivors, affected communities, demining experts, and advocates for the protection of civilians through full universalization and implementation of the Mine Ban Convention. It serves as a global watchdog on issues related to antipersonnel mines and the Convention.

Interview Opportunities

The following campaign representatives are available for interviews. Please contact us to schedule a conversation tailored to your outlet’s needs.

Tamar Gabelnick

Director, International Campaign to Ban Landmines-Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC)

Languages: English, French

Tamar has been a leader in policy and advocacy on humanitarian disarmament and arms export policy since 1998. She has been Director of the ICBL-CMC since 2023 and served as as Treaty Implementation Director with ICBL, and subsequently, Policy Director for the ICBL-CMC from 2005-2015. She previously led the Arms Sales Monitoring Project at the Federation of American Scientists in Washington from 1998 to 2002 and has also worked at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

*** Please note Tamar will be in Vilnius on 31 March and 1 April and will be available for in-person interviews then***

Mr. Per Nergaard

Special Advisor, Strategic Initiatives, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), ICBL-CMC

Languages: English, Norwegian

Per Nergaard has a background in the Norwegian military, with seven years of experience in various roles, including as an officer in the Northern Brigade and instructor on landmines and mine warfare. He has served as a demining platoon leader under UNIFIL in Lebanon and has led NPA's mine action efforts in Malawi, Mozambique, and Bosnia. He now serves as Special Advisor for Strategic Initiatives at NPA.

*** Please note Per will be in Vilnius on 31 March and 1 April and will be available for in-person interviews then***

Mr. Darvin Lisica

Global Special Advisor for Mine Action, NPA, ICBL-CMC

Languages: English, Bosnian

Dr. Darvin Lisica holds a Doctor of Science (PhD) in Security and Defense. He has 12 years of military experience, having served in both the former Yugoslav Army and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the latter, he held key leadership positions, including Independent Battalion Commander and Brigade Commander. Transitioning from the military to humanitarian disarmament, Darvin served as Deputy Director for Operations and Deputy Operational Manager at the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre before joining NPA in 2006. Since then, he has held various leadership roles, including Programme Manager for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Regional Director for South East Europe. In his current role as Global Special Advisor for Mine Action, he provides strategic guidance on demining initiatives worldwide. In parallel, he serves as a professor at the University of Sarajevo, contributing to academic research and education in the field of security and defense.

*** Please note Darvin will be in Vilnius on 31 March and 1 April and will be available for in-person interviews then***

Zoran Ješić

Head, Organization of Amputees UDAS, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ICBL-CMC

Languages: English, Serbian

Zoran Ješić is a landmine survivor and long-time advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. As head of UDAS, an organization supporting amputees in Bosnia - he promotes survivor inclusion and leads advocacy efforts at national and international levels.

Kasia Derlicka-Rosenbauer

Deputy Director, International Campaign to Ban Landmines-Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC)

Languages: Polish, English

Kasia has been involved in the work of the ICBL since 2002, first as a national campaigner and researcher in Poland, and since 2007 as staff. She previously worked for the Polish Red Cross, focusing on International Humanitarian Law and international programs, and briefly for the EU/Red Cross Office in Brussels. Kasia's first exposure to the issue of landmines was in 1997, volunteering with the German NGO Friedensdorf International, where she cared for children from war-torn countries, many of whom were landmine survivors.

Visual Assets


- [ICBL logo](#)
- [Photos for Media](#): Include Minefield warning signs, demining operations, Landmine survivors & ICBL Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony

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