

**ACANU Press Briefing  
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Good morning, and thank you for joining us. Today, we are here to address deeply troubling developments related to International Humanitarian Law and, in particular, the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

Poland yesterday announced plans to produce one million landmines to fortify its borders with Russia and Belarus. Its Deputy Defense Minister confirmed that Poland's state-owned defense industry will lead this effort, calling it a "necessity for national security." As a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty, Poland is currently prohibited from developing, producing, or otherwise acquiring antipersonnel mines.

Poland's announcement comes just after the Ministers of Defense of four NATO states, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, signaled their intent to withdraw from the Mine Ban Treaty. This announcement on Tuesday was swiftly followed by a decision by the full Latvian government to recommend withdrawal from the Mine Ban Treaty, again citing Russia's threat to regional security.

The ICBL understands the fear in these countries at a time of great regional insecurity. But let's be clear: withdrawing from the Mine Ban Treaty is a deeply flawed and dangerous response. **Weapons that predominantly kill and injure civilians will not safeguard any nation's security.** Landmines are inherently indiscriminate, meaning they cannot be aimed at an enemy soldier and have no way of distinguishing between a civilian or military target.

Indeed, Landmine Monitor research shows that civilians account for 85% of AP mine casualties, and children account for 40% of casualties. As a reminder— and Zoran can speak to this from personal experience - landmines are inhumane weapons designed to cause traumatic amputations of one or both legs and to throw dirt and shrapnel back into the wound. These horrific injuries lead to lifelong disability, or even death. Children are at greater risk as their

small and vulnerable bodies, closer to the ground, bear the full force of explosions. Using mines to defend one's territory is therefore a reckless gamble with civilian lives.

Reaching for AP mines to enhance defense capabilities is also a questionable military strategy. In 1997, states decided that any marginal military utility of AP mines was far outweighed by their appalling humanitarian toll. They understood that AP mines limit tactical flexibility and threaten one's own forces as frontlines shift and soldiers need to move through mined areas. AP mines can also provide a false sense of security as mined areas are rapidly breached by determined enemies, including along borders. It is important to remember the borders of these nations are not uninhabited wastelands; they include villages, farms, and fields where civilians live and work. To litter these areas with hidden bombs is to sentence generations to fear and suffering.

These Cold War relics are also incompatible with modern military strategies and arsenals. Investing millions of euros reviving outdated technology would divert resources from much more effective modern defense measures that spare civilians like remote sensors, drones, satellites, and integrated fire systems. In the ICBL's view, returning to anti-personnel mines signals desperation, not strength.

These countries also claim that withdrawing from the Mine Ban Treaty will not undermine their commitments to International Humanitarian Law and that they would be able to use mines in a so-called "responsible" manner. This is a fallacy. As I said, landmines can never respect the IHL principles of distinction or proportionality. There cannot be any so-called safe use either as the location of mines shifts over time; fences and signposts are often removed, and civilians may have no choice but to move through mined areas when fleeing combat or returning home.

Poland, Latvia, and the other countries looking to leave the treaty have long been champions of humanitarian disarmament and the rule of law. Yet today, they stand poised to reverse their own legacy and legitimize a weapon the world has spent nearly three decades eliminating. By doing so, they are stooping to the level of current mine users like Russia, Myanmar, and North Korea, aligning their military practices with countries that show little regard for the protection of civilians risk and undermining their credibility as defenders of international law.

The decisions of these nations will reverberate far beyond their borders. By withdrawing from the Mine Ban Treaty, they risk opening the door for other to join them and reigniting a scourge

the world had nearly eradicated. The Mine Ban Treaty has saved countless lives by destroying stockpiles, clearing fields, supporting victims, and stigmatizing these weapons. These countries will be remembered for undermining such progress.

Today we call on the governments of Latvia, Poland, Estonia, and Lithuania to reconsider this rapid movement towards withdrawal. We ask them to take the time to reflect on safer and more strategic responses to the understandable fear of your populations. There is still time to choose human security over short sighted political gains.