

Closing Keynote
His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan
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Ladies and Gentlemen...good afternoon to you all.

I would like to start off by thanking UNMAS for inviting me to deliver this keynote address to you. It is truly an honour and a pleasure to be here.

Ever since I received the kind invitation, I have been trying to think of what I could possibly say that would keep you all attentive. A few years ago, while on an official visit to Japan... I was asked to give a lecture on landmines and on my work as a Special Envoy of the Mine Ban Convention to over 400 Japanese schoolgirls. Before the lecture I thought to myself...how in heaven's name or what could I possibly say about landmines that would be tantalising enough to grab their attention. Anyhow...I worked for hours on end preparing a presentation and geared myself up to be as animated as possible only to discover to my horror that I had to give the lecture through an interpreter since my Japanese was non-existent and the schoolgirls were not proficient enough in English. I had of course no choice but to carry on...and as I gave the lecture, I tried to be as jovial as possible...but unfortunately the interpreter did not help matters...she interpreted what I said perfectly but in quite a monotonous manner. And sure enough as I gazed at the audience I noticed one girl after another was falling asleep. And then the teachers started walking around the hall with rulers prodding the students to wake up and to pay attention. It was truly an experience...one that I'll never forget! So my intention today is to try to say something interesting that will keep you all very awake.

At the outset, for those of you who don't know me, I would like to just say a few words about who I am and why I am here. My first introduction to mine action occurred in 1993... 25 years ago when as a junior officer in the Jordanian Armed Forces I went to visit a minefield. (I will come back to this...my first encounter with landmines later in my speech as I think you'll find it amusing what I have to say.) Anyhow...a few years later...in 1997, I became the vice-chairman and then chairman of 'Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers' whereupon I had the honour and privilege of assisting and serving our disabled service men and women...many of whom were landmine and ERW survivors. From this perch I then entered the landmine arena full force in 2004 when I was appointed as the chairman of our national

authority...the National Committee for Demining & Rehabilitation NCDR. (This was two weeks before the Second Review Conference in Nairobi!) And my first executive decision was to appoint my dear friend and colleague Rte. Brig. Gen. Mohammed Breikat...whom I am sure most of you know...as the Director General of NCDR. A few years later I became the President of the 8MSP as we hosted the conference in Jordan and then two years after that I was asked to become one of the 'Special Envoys' of the Convention for 'Universalization'...which I will elaborate on a little further in just a few minutes time. And in addition...as of 2014, I was appointed as the President of Jordan's 'Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'...which is the government entity entrusted with spearheading disability policymaking for the whole kingdom. In other words...disability has become my 'thing' lately. So my dear friends and colleagues...that's who I am and what I have been up to and why I am here... and I sincerely hope that my humble experience will allow me to leave with you today some uplifting thoughts and sentiments about the future.

Anyhow...back to my story and the early days of NCDR...when I was first appointed as Chairman... I was really excited about getting to work and immersing myself on the landmine issue but then the reality very quickly set in...and I felt like I had hit a brick wall. I was shocked to discover that the general situation at NCDR was dismal. There was a lot of administrative mismanagement, very low capacity among the staff, morale was way down, no international contacts or networks had been tapped and most of all there was no money whatsoever to do anything. The situation was so difficult that I felt like I was climbing Everest with no oxygen!!

Nevertheless...despite the harsh reality, Brig. Gen. Mohammed and I carried on believing that if our approach was serious and that if we worked hard...we would no doubt gradually improve and achieve our goals...and this is frankly what happened. At this juncture I must say, that we were at the time superbly aided and supported by Dr. Olaf Jeurgensen (who is here today and I am sure many of you know)...who was appointed by the UNDP as our Chief Technical Advisor for mine action. His sound advice and expertise made a world of difference and went a long long way in helping us build NCDR as an effective and credible national authority. We are forever grateful and indebted to him and thank him dearly for his support to Jordan.

As for my country, we once upon a time had 500 minefields polluting our sacred land that contained over 300,000 landmines. That was the initial size of the problem in 1993 when we first started demining. By 2004 when I took over the NCDR the number had fallen to just over 200,000 and by 2012 we had completed the mission.

So...the question that is often asked is how did Jordan get the job done? What did Jordan do that allowed it to demine all its minefields and become a regional leader in mine-action? The simple answer is 'ownership'...or rather 'national ownership.' Of course...there is no one-size-fits-all model. What worked in Jordan might not necessarily work elsewhere. When we first started working on this issue in late 2004, we worked on formulating a national 'mine action' plan with all the relevant stakeholders and made sure that it was part and parcel of Jordan's overall national plan for development. We then called for a general meeting with all our potential donor countries and explained to them in detail what we hoped to achieve. After a great deal of discussion and negotiation the EU decided that it would 'go out on a limb' and support us in demining a certain area in the Northern part of the Jordan Valley. This was basically a 'test'...and I am happy to say that we past it. From that point onwards things began to take off.

Our challenge was to create a viable, credible and effective civilian 'National Authority' from scratch. And the only way this would be done was if we were persistent in overcoming our challenges... especially bureaucratic difficulties. We had to persevere in implementation and to garner community support and involvement. Creating and fostering information networks and donor partnerships was also essential. And at all times we had to be transparent with all our stakeholders and partners in order to foster relationships based on trust and confidence. All of this we managed to achieve through hard work. There were no short cuts and I had no magic wand in my hand. But what I did have that was of fundamental importance was the 'political will' and backing of the Jordanian Government from His Majesty the King way up top, the Prime Minister, the relevant ministers, the Chief of Staff and everyone below...all the way down to the deminer in the field. Hence the main message I would like to pass on to you today is that mine action is vital and possible. It is NOT impossible...it can be done and is doable!!! Essentially it is all about adopting a serious attitude and owning the problem at the highest levels of government possible.

Dear Friends,

These working principles that we adopted in Jordan, which I have just mentioned are clearly embraced in the Maputo Action Plan of 2014...which starts off with the following sentence:

The State Parties reaffirm their unqualified commitment to ending the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines for all people for all time, and aspire to end the era of anti-personnel mines.

This first sentence of the plan grasps the essence of what is required by us all...’unqualified commitment.’ If all mine affected states parties truly ‘reaffirm their unqualified commitment’ to the cause and follow through with their affirmation with decisive and continuous action till the bitter end, then we will see real progress.

As you all know, besides our solemn commitment to the Convention, we are also bound to pursue the United Nations’ ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ that largely encompass the goals of the Convention. The SDGs are ambitious and a real challenge to achieve for most countries...and they won’t be fully realized by mine affected states unless success is attained in mine action. So the pressure is on...there are international legal commitments that we all must abide by...and expectations are high, especially among survivors and their families...and there is a duty incumbent upon us all to make sure that we do all that we can to minimize casualties or to preferably stop the occurrence of casualties altogether.

With these sentiments in mind...and in order to forward the goals of the Convention...it has been a great pleasure and honour for me to serve as one of the Convention’s ‘Special Envoys’ for universalization alongside HRH Princess Astrid of Belgium. Princess Astrid has done truly remarkable work for the Convention and has exuded incredible efforts for its ‘universalization.’ As for me, I have also humbly strived to pursue the same line, and since 2009, have visited a

number of States not party to the Convention in an attempt to engage them at the highest of levels on the issue of universalization and to discuss with them the possibility or likelihood of future accession. I have conducted official missions to the US, China, South Korea, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Tuvalu, Singapore, Tonga and Bahrain. And separate visits to Libya and Azerbaijan, where I did venture to raise the question regarding possible accession. I have also visited a number of States Parties that have been facing 'implementation' difficulties in order to discuss with them ways and methods of pushing on with implementation according to their respective national plans and or the extension requests approved by the States Parties.

In all the countries that I have mentioned, I was fortunate to meet with their respective leaders...3 presidents, 1 vice-president, 2 prime ministers, 1 governor general, 1 national security advisor, a crown prince and many ministers, vice-ministers, chiefs of staff and other government and military officials.

What I concluded from all these missions was the reaffirmation of the importance of high-level engagement. The engagement was crucial because I quickly realized that in most countries the issue of landmines was not on the radar screen whatsoever and in many cases it was the first time that the leaders I met were obliged to even consider the issue.

I humbly believe that we should continue with this type of engagement, whether conducted by me, HRH Princess Astrid, or someone else because it is an effective method, alongside other initiatives that should run concurrently in order for more success on the universalization front be attained. A flurry of diplomatic activity and grass roots action should be devised by all those concerned in order to affect real change. Only then will we see more states acceding.

Despite these 'universalization' challenges and the remaining concerns that face the Convention as a whole, I myself am still hopeful and optimistic. The Convention has been a great success without a doubt and things appear to be rosy. Millions of landmines have been lifted, stockpiles have been destroyed and the numbers of victims has steadily decreased over the years. This is all music to our ears.

On the other hand, many mine-affected states with Article 5 obligations are falling behind their targets even after all the lessons we have learned.... Why is this the case? It should be the opposite! In addition, in most mine-affected states, landmine & ERW survivors have not yet been afforded their rights on par with others. Again...why is this the case? Donor states too...that once were powerful financial contributors have gradually cut their support. Added to all of this is the fact that the states not party to the Convention have among themselves tens of millions of landmines in the ground, and probably the same amount stockpiled if not more. Once all is considered...the picture in reality may not be so rosy after all!

So what does this all mean for the future of the Convention? In my humble view...we must take an honest and objective look at the situation and not lose sight of the fact that we still have a very long way to go until we achieve the goals of the Convention. We must safeguard the health and stamina of the Convention and keep the momentum going. That is what I believe is our ultimate challenge! We owe it to ourselves and all the poor souls who perished in the past as a result of a landmine/ERW explosion and/or have been maimed or injured. We must at all costs put an end to this tragedy that has gone on for far too long.

In this sense I was grateful to learn during the Sixteenth Meeting of the States Parties about the ongoing work of the Convention's Committees and the greater focus given to the individual situation of States Parties. As I mentioned earlier, no country is the same, there is no cookie cutter solution that can be applied everywhere. Looking deep into the challenges of individual countries and building and fostering real partnerships will be essential to see our work through. I take this opportunity to wish Afghanistan all the best in the Presidency of the Convention.

In conclusion and for the sake of some levity, I promised in the beginning of my speech to tell you about my first experience with landmines. In 1993, while I was serving as a junior officer in our military intelligence, one of my fellow officers asked me one day if I would like to accompany him down to the Jordan Valley to visit the 'Royal Engineering Corps' new demining operation...to which I readily agreed. When we arrived at the minefield, the officer

who I was with, very cavalierly asked me, “shall we go in?”... pointing excitedly towards the minefield. I was taken aback and astounded by the fact that he wanted us to enter the minefield, albeit via a safe corridor that had ‘supposedly’ been cleared, but at the same time was cognizant of the fact that I could not appear to be afraid for fear of being viewed as a ‘coward’ by the other soldiers who were milling around. So on we went, into the minefield with no protection whatsoever, via the ‘supposed’ safe lane, and we walked right up to a poor deminer who was on his belly, sweating from the unrelenting heat, and trying very bravely to stop the shaking of his hand as he prodded the ground with his prodder. We, my officer colleague and myself...I ashamedly admit...STOOD RIGHT OVER the poor deminer for some time, looking straight down at the mine he was demining and started asking him all sorts of questions. The soldier was most gracious and answered our questions politely but it was clearly obvious that we had left him in a state of total exasperation! Only later did I realize and understand how absolutely foolish and ignorant we were! Nobody had told us otherwise and for some reason our bravado had squashed any common sense that we had! In 1993...our engineers had no proper demining standards and safety matters were just seen as an inconvenience. Anyhow I thank my lucky stars that nothing happened to the deminer or us on that fateful day.

My dear friends I hope that I have been able to keep you attentive with my few bits of advice and anecdotes. I wish you all the very best in your mine action endeavors in your respective countries. Stay focused, be serious in your approach and never lose sight of the fact that what you are doing is unbelievably important for your country and your people. I thank UNMAS, UNDP, GICHD and the ISU and anyone else who has been involved in putting this great annual event together.

God Bless & Good Luck to You