



"All entities must renounce to the use of antipersonnel mines and engage in their total elimination in order to attain the ultimate aim of the Ottawa Convention, these mines have no place in the 21st century," said the Director of [United Nations Mine Action Service](#) (UNMAS), Ms. Agnès Marcaillou at the Colloquium on the "Ottawa Convention as a first step for humanitarian disarmament" which took place at the Institute for Defence in Brussels on 28 March 2013 and that was opened in the presence of H.R.H. Princess Astrid of Belgium, Minister of Defence, Mr. Pieter De Crem and a representative of the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Didier Reynders.

Later in the afternoon, H.R.H. Princess Astrid inaugurated the UN-Belgian exhibition on mine action 'Landmines, treacherous weapons' which will be open for visitors at the Royal Museum of the Armed forces and Military History till 28 June. The exhibition is built around the UNMAS 'the UN Common Cause' exhibit.

In her keynote speech, Agnès Marcaillou praised the Government of Belgium for its support to the UNMAS rapid response program in Gaza: "This Belgian-funded project has enabled post-conflict reconstruction, and assisted the people of Gaza to regain a sense of normalcy in

the aftermath of recent conflicts".

UNMAS Director stressed that mine action is now encompassing all mines, cluster munitions, Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), as well as ammunition and Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs), a concept adopted by the new UN Mine Action Strategy.

The Belgian Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister of Defense, Mr. Pieter De Crem said "it is no surprise that Belgium has been at the forefront of the fight against landmines since in the past it suffered from this problem". He also highlighted that "more efforts need to be done to tackle the causes of this problem".

Umedjon Naimov, a 22 year old young man from Tajikistan, who stepped on a landmine 10 years ago, gave his personal account of the impact this has on people's lives and called on countries to give priority in assisting the victims. Other speakers in the colloquium included representatives from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Handicap International, the Belgian Defense (UNIFIL Commander) and the Ottawa Implementation support Unit (ISU).

All speakers agreed that the Ottawa Convention was groundbreaking because it included assistance to victims and that with it a lot of progress has been achieved. "The number of victims has decreased from 25.000 to 4.000 per year", revealed Sylvie Brigot-Vilain from the ICBL.

Nonetheless, as Ms Nicole Hogg from the ICRC and Mr. Kerry Brinkert from the ISU underlined, there are still countries who have not destroyed their stockpiles of landmines. "Communities continue to suffer because the socio-economic impact is enormous", said Mr. Brinkert. And "children are the majority of victims", reminded Ms. Hildegarde Vansijan from Handicap International. "This weapon does not distinguish the foot of a child from the foot of a soldier", stressed the ICLB representative.

The Ottawa Convention was the first disarmament treaty driven by civil society to fight this reality.

The conference was co-organised by the Royal Higher Institute for Defense in close cooperation with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and United Nations Brussels. The exhibition has been set up jointly by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the United Nations Mine Action Service and Handicap International, in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC) the Flemish United Nations Association (VVN), the Association pour les Nations Unies (APNU) and the Belgian National Institute for Veterans and Victims of War.