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## Ottawa Treaty crucially important to reinforcing Canada's resolve and protecting civilian lives

April 4 marks the International Day for Action Against Landmines, which recognizes the substantial progress made by those who tirelessly work for land release and provide victim assistance.



The looming threat of Russia and President Vladimir Putin has led to five Eastern European members announcing they will withdraw from the Mine Ban Treaty in the last month alone, marking the first time any country has left the agreement and prompting concerns about its future. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

**Opinion** | BY [LLOYD AXWORTHY](#), [LOUISE ARBOUR](#) | April 4, 2025

The Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty of 1997 stands as a landmark testament to Canada's leadership on the global stage. By prohibiting the use, production, and transfer of landmines, the Treaty has dramatically reduced the global threat posed by these weapons. Between 1999 and 2013, the number of victims was reduced by a staggering 85 per cent, saving nearly 20,000 lives each year. In addition, vast areas of land have been cleared, over 50 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed, and an increasing number of victims have received life-saving assistance.

April 4 marks the International Day for Action Against Landmines, which recognizes the substantial progress made, thanks to the efforts of Canada and organizations like Humanity & Inclusion Canada, who tirelessly work for land release and provide victim assistance.

Yet, 25 years later, there is increasing disregard for international law and the Conventions that ensure the protection of civilians in conflict.



*Lloyd Axworthy is the former minister of foreign affairs, and is chair of Humanity & Inclusion Canada's Board of Governors. Handout photograph*

We call on Canada to once again lead the way and reaffirm its role as a convener and guardian of the global norms that safeguard the most vulnerable. The resurgence in the use of landmines and the once-unthinkable prospect of States Parties withdrawing from the Treaty demand urgent action.

Landmines are instruments of terror that recognize no ceasefire, and honour no peace agreement. These weapons—still present in 58 countries—do not target enemy combatants, but rather, 85 per cent of landmine victims are civilians, with children disproportionately affected, and with too many injuries leading to amputations and permanent disabilities. These weapons further destroy

livelihoods, preventing communities from cultivating contaminated agricultural land and accessing health and education infrastructures.

### **A growing crisis of landmine victims**

After years of steady decline, the number of victims has started to rise again, accelerating as a direct consequence of Russia's illegal and full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The latest report from the Landmine Monitor reveals a shocking 22-per-cent increase in the number of victims wounded or killed in just one year, with 37 per cent of those victims being children.



*Louise Arbour is the former United Nations high commissioner for human rights, and former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

The looming threat of Russia has led to five Eastern European members announcing they will withdraw from the Mine Ban Treaty in the last month alone, marking the first time any country has left the agreement and prompting concerns about the treaty's future. Falling like dominos, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and now Finland have expressed their intention to use landmines within their territories, endangering the lives of their citizens for decades to come. Is this not another win for Russia and other countries who seek to weaken global humanitarian standards?

The reactions from other States Parties have been at best, timid, and at worst, nonexistent. Yet it is precisely during times of conflict that international humanitarian law must be upheld.

As concerned citizens, we call on Canada to renew its commitment to the global fight against landmines. We are a nation of strong principles, believing in the value of international solidarity, in working with our neighbours and allies, not against them.

Canada must use its soft power as a global convener to preserve global support of the Ottawa Treaty—an effective and critical tool for the protection of civilian populations. The world’s most vulnerable need our leadership now more than ever.

*Lloyd Axworthy is the former minister of foreign affairs, and is chair of Humanity & Inclusion Canada’s Board of Governors. Louise Arbour is the former United Nations high commissioner for human rights, and former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.*

*Additional signatories to this piece are: Marc Garneau, Christian Paradis, Allan Rock, Raymond Chrétien, General Roméo Dallaire, Christine St. Pierre, Jean-François Lépine, Jocelyn Coulon, Louis de Lorimier, Rosemary McCarney, Laurence Deschamps-Laporte, François Audet–OCCAH, Anne Delorme–Humanity & Inclusion Canada, Alistair Edgar–Canadian Landmine Foundation, Erin Hunt–Mines Action Canada, and Kyle Matthews–Montreal Institute for Global Security.*

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