

International Mine Awareness Day

4 April 2018

Speech of EU Ambassador Kristian Schmidt

Nay Pyi Taw

Your Excellency Minister U Win Myat Aye,

Excellencies, colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and Mingalabar.

Every year, International Mine Awareness Day is an opportunity to take stock of the progress made in banning one of the deadliest traps for people affected by conflict: antipersonnel mines. And we have indeed come a long way since the late 1990s, when a large group of countries gathered in Ottawa and agreed that antipersonnel mines should not have a place in our world.

Today, no less than 164 countries around the globe have joined this movement. Thirty countries that were heavily mine contaminated are now mine-free. Around the world, removing and banning mines have been part of reconciliation efforts after years of conflict.

We are proud to say that all 28 EU member states are party to the Ottawa Treaty banning the use of anti-personal mines. Around the world, European experts are supporting mine action, including here in South East Asia, together with some of the leading organisations in the field (eg. Danish Demining Group, HALO Trust, Mines Advisory Group).

Unfortunately, though, the work is far from done. Sadly, the conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Yemen and Ukraine have resulted in horrendous increases in the number of mine victims. In 2016, monitoring organisations reported the largest number of child casualties ever recorded.

This has to stop, and it has to stop now.

Let's not forget that antipersonnel mines are really nasty weapons. They mostly impact civilians. Eighty percent of the victims are farmers cultivating crops to feed their families, children playing in fields or heading to school, refugees fleeing from violence or people returning to their homes after conflicts have ended. Landmines indeed are not only a deadly trap for people during conflict, but remain a threat to their lives long after conflicts have ended. Not to mention the economic cost: While a mine can be produced for \$ 3, it can cost

up to \$ 1,000 to remove it. Does Myanmar really want to impose this burden on future generations?

Indeed, Ladies and gentlemen, let's not close our eyes to what is happening in Myanmar, today. The numbers speak volumes: mine casualties in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States have gone up, and they have gone up significantly over the past years. In 2016/2017, 337 casualties have been reported – and out of every four at least one was a child. One out of four mine victims lost his or her life. People are being killed and injured in areas with ongoing conflicts, but not only: nine out of Myanmar's 14 states and regions are contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Dear Minister U Win Myat Aye, I am therefore very grateful that you again decided to host this event today. You and the members of the Myanmar Mine Action Working Group are a ray of hope for all the people in Myanmar by leading the way in making Myanmar a safer place for children, farmers, rural communities, displaced people and refugees who wish to return to their land and giving them a real perspective in improving their lives.

Because behind each statistical figure there is a story of hardship, grief, poverty, hunger and pain. Landmine contamination holds back the socio-economic development of communities from recovering from decades of conflict. . Most survivors of landmine incidents end up unemployed due to their handicaps and are discriminated against. Really, farmers should not have to choose between cultivating crops on contaminated land or letting their families starve

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past years the European Union together with UNICEF has developed a Mine Risk Education toolkit that is now used to raise awareness among communities in mine contaminated areas across the country. The trainings have already reached thousands of adults and children, and has saved many lives.

But we are only treating the symptoms here; we are not curing the disease.

How can we ask the children to be careful, when the adults are still spreading the danger?

I know preparations have already been made to join the Ottawa Treaty – I very much hope the Myanmar government will soon be signing this key international convention. When you do, we'll not only applaud you warmly. Let me assure you that the European Union stands ready to fully support you in starting urgently needed demining actions to eradicate landmines forever from Myanmar.

Let me therefore call on all sides – the government, the Tatmadaw and the ethnic groups alike – to do the right thing for the country, for unity, for peace and justice for the next generations: stop laying mines, ban them and let's start the clean-up for a peaceful and prosperous future.

Thank you.