

Statement by
The Honorable Sandra S. Pierantozzi
Minister of State, Republic of Palau
The Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World
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Madame President, HRH, Honorable Delegations, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Sandra Sumang Pierantozzi and I am the Minister of State and Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Palau. To those who do not know where Palau is—Palau is an archipelago consisting of over 200 small islands in Micronesia in the western Pacific, just north of the equator, east of the Philippines and north of Australia and Papua New Guinea. We boast of a total population of approximately 20,000 and gained our independence 15 years ago on October 1, 1994 from the United States of America under a former Trusteeship with the United Nations. Having flown five flights and 14 time zones, from the north to the south hemisphere to Cartagena, I am pleased to bring you greetings from the people and the Government of our Republic.

I never knew that as the first woman senator of Palau some ten years ago that a political commitment I made on behalf of our government would some day bring me to this large South American country to fulfill what all of us here today began in Ottawa in 1997.

As one of the world's smallest of nations, Palau has never produced, stockpiled, used or transferred anti-personnel mines. Palau is not affected by emplaced anti-personnel mines. Palau does not even have any armed forces. Yet, from our experience in the last two world wars which we had nothing to do with, we learned our lessons that it is a matter of national security that Palau becomes involved in the international system and especially international humanitarian laws. Not only will international humanitarian laws help protect the Palauan people, but being an active actor in our corner of the world would be Palau's contribution to international security. This fulfills Palau's obligation under the UN Charter. It is Palau's perspective that being a member of the United Nations does not mean always asking and receiving benefits, but also there is a moral and ethical element for a member country to discharge some actions in order to make the United Nations effective.

In 1979, Palau adopted its own constitution which is the first in the world to ban from its territory any and all nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons intended for use in warfare. And now to add landmines and cluster munitions would make Palau and her maritime boundary free from all weapons that cause great human misery. Even possession of firearms and ammunition is banned by our Constitution, thereby making Palau a peaceful place to be.

Be that as it may, Palau believes this is not enough, because small arms and light weapons traders and smugglers are sophisticated in their trade. This is why Palau is active in universalizing this Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions in our region. Just imagine if the entire Pacific Ocean is nuclear-free, landmines-free, and cluster munitions-free? Our combined Exclusive Economic Zones would make it difficult for those weapons to cross our maritime boundaries to their destinations.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, some people may say Palau should be more worried about climate change and sea level rise and saving whales, sharks and turtles. That is true, but Palau believes that no man is an island, that this world is much too smaller than we think. Globalization has linked us all together. We share the same problems and we share similar solutions. It is our collective humanity which will save us. That is why Palau commits itself to pursue universalizing of this Treaty in our region.

Palau would not have made it to be the last country to join the Mine Ban Treaty if it were not for the support of the International Support Unit of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining, Mr. Kerry Brinkert, UNDP, our friends in the Civil Society, and our allies. To all of them and to you all, we say thank you.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have just witnessed the 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall which triggered the Velvet Revolution and fall of communism in Eastern Europe. Mankind was once again free. As human beings, we have always had hope inside of us that tomorrow will be better if we work hard and not give up on our dreams. And with this, let me share with you one our country's dreams—Palau dreams of a world free of landmines and cluster munitions, starting first in the Pacific Ocean! As a first step, the Republic of Palau has addressed its first anti-personnel landmine problem and on 2 November 2009, destroyed all of the known AP landmines on its soil. A lesser known fact is that Palau is affected by Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) contamination leftover from World War II with that ERW corroded and volatile due to passage of time. A national capacity is being developed to tackle the problem, but Palau now seeks financial resources to continue its clearance program.

In closing, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of my delegation and the Republic of Palau, let me say thank you to our beautiful host Cartagena for her gracious hospitality and welcome. And since today is December 1st, let me be the first to wish all the very best of the holiday season to you and to your loved ones. Muchas Gracias!