



## *Committee on International Justice and Peace*

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February 12, 2014

The Honorable Susan E. Rice  
National Security Advisor  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ambassador Rice:

On April 4, 2011, you commemorated the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance and said that “failure to deal with unexploded ordnance exacts a far greater cost in terms of security and human potential.” You noted U.S. leadership in clearing landmines and concluded that “we must resolve to strengthen our efforts to ensure that the earth is sown with the fruits of opportunity and prosperity, not dangerous remnants of war.”

In keeping with the spirit of your statement, our Conference of Catholic Bishops urges the Administration to conclude its policy review on banning antipersonnel landmines and move on to sign and ratify the Convention on the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction, otherwise known as the Ottawa Convention or the Mine Ban Treaty.

Our views are grounded in Church teaching that calls for a ban on landmines on moral grounds since they are indiscriminate weapons that kill and maim innocent civilians during and long after hostilities end. There is a legacy of devastation in places such as Iraq, Laos, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola, Colombia and Lebanon while landmines appear to have been used in more recent conflicts such as Syria. The Holy See has noted the “deplorable humanitarian consequences of anti-personnel mines.”

At the December 2009 Cartagena Summit on anti-personnel mines, the Holy See appealed to all nations to join the 156 countries that have already adopted this convention, which has been in force since 1999. In 2012, Pope Benedict XVI launched an appeal to raise awareness about the problems of landmines saying, “I encourage everyone to be committed to freeing humanity from these terrible and devious weapons....” Pope Francis, with his emphasis on peace and protection of innocent civilians, would certainly agree.

President Barack Obama has shown leadership in nuclear non-proliferation. Our Conference of Bishops lent its strong support to the ratification of the New START Treaty. Please urge the President to exercise his leadership on banning landmines by acceding to the Ottawa Convention. Be assured that our Conference would affirm this action and work vigorously for ratification of a treaty that rids the world of these weapons which cause long-term, irreparable, and indiscriminate harm.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates

Bishop of Des Moines

Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace