

## Kuwait's adherence to treaty vital

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**GENEVA (Agencies):** Releasing on Monday the Landmine Monitor Report 2007, Steve Goose from Human Rights Watch praised the adherence of Kuwait and Iraq to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Goose said, in a news conference announcing the report, that it is extremely important the accession of Iraq to the treaty because we try to put a focus on the Middle East region for universalizing this treaty for a region that had the lowest number of adherence in the past and which is changing now with Iraq and Kuwait coming on board and several others who are ready to join in the near future.

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He added that Iraq is one of the most heavily mine affected countries in the world largely from the Iraq-Iran war from the 1980s, and it likely has many stockpiles many of which may be uncontrolled, and many victims of landmines. Goose said that Iraq is the kind of state that you want to come on board because of so many of the obligations come into play. He added that this will be a difficult treaty for Iraq to implement and will require a great deal of international assistance to be able to locate and destroy its stockpile and to be able to clear its mine fields in a timely fashion.

On the adherence of Kuwait to the treaty, Goose said that Kuwait is a country affected by cluster munitions than by mines, and a country from a region of high importance in terms of making this a universal norm against the weapon. The report warns that 14 of 29 countries with treaty mandated clearance deadlines in 2009 or 2010 do not appear on track to meet them, despite a treaty provision allowing for 10 years to complete mine clearance. Of the 14, France, Niger, the United Kingdom and Venezuela have failed to even start formal clearance operations. Britain is one of 12 countries likely to miss a 2009 deadline to clear all land mines from its territory, a group that campaigns against the weapon said Monday. The report said France, which uses mines to protect a military installation in the east African nation of Djibouti, also hasn't begun clearing operations despite committing to the deadline.

In total 217,000 anti-personnel mines, 18,000 anti-vehicle mines and more than 2.15 million pieces of debris known as "explosive remnants of war" were destroyed in 2006, the year covered in the report.

Four countries - Iraq, Indonesia, Kuwait and Montenegro - joined the Ottawa treaty prohibiting the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of land mines during the period, taking the number of signatories to 155. The United States has not signed the treaty and is not bound by its provisions. Williams and ICBL received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. The number of reported landmine victims fell 16 percent in the past year, but Western countries such as France and Britain must do more to clear mines in Africa and the Falklands, a campaign group said Monday. The number of victims dropped to 5,751 in 2007, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). "This big picture is extremely encouraging," ICBL delegation head Stephen Goose told journalists, noting that only the governments of Russia and Myanmar used antipersonnel mines in 2006.

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