

NDP Response to the Mines Action Canada

Note: We have yet to release our full platform but here are the answers to date outlining our commitments.

Conventional Weapons

- 1. Canada is a State Party to the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which comprehensively prohibits cluster munitions and provides the framework for clearance of cluster munition remnants and assistance to victims. If your party forms the government after the 2015 election, what steps will Canada take to promote the universalization of the Convention on Cluster Munitions?*
- 2. If your party forms the next government, how will Canada stigmatize the use of cluster munitions by any state - even our allies?*

NDP Response: Cluster munitions are inhumane and indiscriminate weapons. They have a terrible impact on civilians worldwide, and they must be banned. The NDP is pleased that Canada has joined over 100 of the world's nations, including the majority of our NATO allies, in signing the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The Convention will ban cluster munitions, and help end the suffering they cause.

In order to persuade others to take meaningful measures to end the use of cluster munitions, we must take our own responsibilities seriously. Sadly, the Conservative government's legislation to implement the Convention undermines the very spirit of the treaty. Bill C-6 has numerous loopholes, including an extremely broad list of exceptions for using cluster munitions. In its original form, this clause permitted Canadian soldiers to use, acquire, possess, and/or transport cluster munitions whenever they are acting in conjunction with another country that is not a member of the Convention, and to request the use of cluster munitions by another country.

At the Foreign Affairs Committee, the NDP supported Canadian and international civil society groups in urging changes to the bill. We were successful in pushing the government to formally prohibit the use of cluster munitions by Canadian soldiers. Unfortunately, the other loopholes remain, making Canada's commitment to ending the use of cluster munitions superficial at best. Indeed, Bill C-6 may even damage the Convention as a whole by establishing an international precedent for opt-outs and exemptions.

At Foreign Affairs Committee, we proposed an amendment that would have aligned the Canadian legislation with the original treaty that Canada signed. An NDP government would ensure that Canada's actions meet our commitments as a signatory to this important treaty, by mandating that Canadian Forces personnel not use, develop, possess, acquire, stockpile, transfer, or order the use of cluster munitions, including during operations with non-party states.

3. *The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has issued a completion challenge for all states to join the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines and for all mine clearance to be completed by 2025. Canada as a State Party to the Ottawa Treaty, committed to work towards the goal of completion by 2025 via the Maputo Declaration 2014. If your party forms the government after the 2015 election, what concrete steps will the government take to ensure the work of the 1997 Ottawa Treaty is completed?*

4. *For many years, Canada was a leading (top five) donor to mine action and victim assistance programs. Recently, Canada has fallen out of the top ten supporters of mine action. If your party forms the next government, what steps will you take to return Canada to its traditional position of leadership on mine action funding?*

NDP Response: Landmines are abhorrent weapons that contravene basic principles of international humanitarian law, including discrimination and proportionality. The NDP is proud of Canada's historical leadership in working to end the use of landmines globally through the Ottawa Treaty process.

Unfortunately, the Conservative government has chosen to abandon this proud tradition. Conservative cuts to international initiatives related to mine action include the elimination of funding for the Young Professional Internship Program at Mines Action Canada, which offered young Canadians overseas placements with partner organizations working to reduce landmine risk and assist victims.

The NDP is committed to restoring Canada as a leader on the global eradication of landmines. We will actively encourage the roughly 30 countries that are not party to the Ottawa Treaty to join, and contribute Canadian resources and technical expertise to international projects that support the objectives of the Treaty.

5. *Canada helped negotiate, but has not subsequently joined, the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty - the world's first Treaty to regulate the global arms trade. 130 countries have now joined the ATT, including major weapons exporters such as the US and UK, and all of NATO. If your party forms the next government, would ensuring Canada joins the ATT be part of your efforts to help stop weapons getting into the hands of human rights abusers and warlords?*

NDP Response: New Democrats applaud the international agreement of a global Arms Trade Treaty, and have strongly urged the Canadian government to sign the treaty and immediately begin the ratification process. An NDP government would make signing and ratifying the ATT a priority.

Over a year ago, the NDP pointed out that Canada was standing with such countries as Belarus, North Korea, Syria, Russia, and Iran in refusing to sign the ATT. Today,

tragically, nothing has changed. The 2015 G7 communiqué declared that members “emphasise the importance of strengthening the system of multilateral treaties and commitments and in this regard stress the importance of the Arms Trade Treaty.” Yet Canada remains alone among our G7 and NATO allies in refusing to sign the agreement. The government’s continued refusal to sign – much less ratify – the treaty is a disservice to Canada’s reputation, credibility, and influence, as well as the objectives of global arms control.

New Democrats are committed to taking our international responsibilities on arms control seriously. An NDP government will work with the rest of the world in working toward a better and more prosperous future – a future without an illegal weapons trade.

6. *Countries with known human rights abuses to have little trouble obtaining weapons. Notwithstanding your party’s position on the Arms Trade Treaty, what steps will your government take to ensure that Canadian weapons do not end up in the hands of those who known or suspected to abuse human rights?*

NDP Response: Canadians deserve to know that Canadian weapons do not end up in the hands of brutal or oppressive regimes. We have serious concerns about the current government’s repeated delays of official reports and adequate transparency on Canadian weapons exports.

We believe that the Canadian government must follow established Canadian policy guidelines that clearly state that Canada will closely control the export of military goods to countries “whose governments have a persistent record of serious violations of the human rights of their citizens, unless it can be demonstrated that there is no reasonable risk that the goods might be used against the civilian population.” An NDP government will respect these guidelines in their entirety, and ensure that all Canadian military or dual-use sales comply with these domestic guidelines as well as our international obligations under the ATT. We will also ensure proper transparency and public accountability, with timely release of annual reports on Canadian weapons exports.

Nuclear Weapons

7. *At the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, Austria issued the Austrian Pledge in which they call on states to “identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons”. The Pledge has since been internationalized as The Humanitarian Pledge. It is open for endorsement by other countries and thus far over 100 countries have endorsed the Pledge. If your party forms the government after the 2015 election, will Canada endorse the Humanitarian Pledge?*

8. *In international disarmament forums, there have been a number of humanitarian statements about nuclear weapons with wide support. Canada has not joined any of the main humanitarian statements over the past three years partially due to objections about the inclusion of the phrase under any circumstances in the sentence, “it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.” If your party forms the government after the 2015 election, will Canada join any future humanitarian statements and state clearly that the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances is unacceptable? If not, could you please articulate under what circumstances your party believes the use of nuclear weapons is appropriate?*

NDP Response: The NDP has shown consistent leadership on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. In a 2010 vote, the House unanimously supported the NDP's motion to back international efforts toward non-proliferation and disarmament. Unfortunately, Conservatives have taken little action since then on this critical issue.

The NDP firmly believes that it is in the interest of Canada and the world that nuclear weapons are never used. We have challenged the current government repeatedly in the House of Commons on its failure to recognize the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. An NDP government would sign the Humanitarian Pledge.

More broadly, the NDP believes it is time to pursue a global ban on the use of nuclear weapons, and strongly supports an active Canadian role in multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts. By engaging Canadians on this issue and taking a strong stand on eliminating these obsolete, counterproductive, and wasteful weapons, we can help build a safer world.

We would like also to take the opportunity to share with you that our NDP Foreign Affairs Critic, MP Paul Dewar, is one of the co-chairs of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.

Emerging Issues on Protecting Civilians in Armed Conflict

9. *Canada is participating in the multilateral meetings held since 2014 on technical, legal, ethical, and operational concerns relating to “lethal autonomous weapons systems” or “killer robots” but has said little and has yet to issue national policy on the topic. Autonomous weapons systems are not armed drones, but instead they are future weapons that would be able to select and fire upon targets without human involvement. As of May 2015, Canada does not have a position on autonomous weapons systems. If your party forms the government after 2015, how will your government respond to the concerns raised, including the call to pre-emptively ban systems that would select and attack targets without further human intervention?*

NDP Response: NDP Foreign Affairs Critic Paul Dewar attended the Canadian launch of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots last April, and has stated publicly that weapons that kill without human control are inhumane. Given the legal, practical, and ethical questions being raised in Canada and abroad about lethal autonomous weapons, we need to be serious and proactive about considering the consequences of this technology before it becomes a part of warfare. Canada should express ethical concerns with these weapons systems.

The Convention on Conventional Weapons met last May for the first international discussions on autonomous weapons systems. 87 states including Canada attended the meeting under the Convention on Conventional Weapons along with representatives from UN agencies and registered non-governmental organizations. The reality is that the international community is preparing to deal with this next frontier in military technology. Canada should be engaging responsibly at the table.

10. *Recent research confirms that when heavy explosive weapons (weapons with wide area effects) are used in populated areas the vast majority of casualties are civilians. To enhance the protection of civilians from the effects of explosive weapons, members of civil society are calling on states to avoid the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas. Will your party support an international political commitment to this effect, and review and strengthen domestic policies and practices on the use of explosive weapons?*

NDP Response: Just as with cluster munitions and landmines, the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas is almost necessarily indiscriminate. A bomb does not distinguish between military personnel and civilians, so the people responsible for deploying force must do so themselves. Canadians should be able to have faith that the Canadian Armed Forces will exercise the utmost diligence in ensuring that Canadian weapons are both precise and accurately targeted, and that they do not cause civilian casualties.

The NDP is committed to ensuring that Canadian military operations comply with the letter and spirit of international humanitarian law, and working to build international consensus on the special importance and need of protecting civilians during conflict in populated areas.

11. *As the use of armed drones for targeted strikes on suspected terrorists grows, so do concerns over the number of civilians who have died in these attacks. If your party forms the next government, what will be the Government of Canada's policy in regards to the international legal framework, in particular international human rights law and international humanitarian law, on the use of armed drones in and outside armed conflict?*

NDP Response: New Democrats strongly believe that any military action must conform to the law of armed conflict, including principles of proportionality and civilian-military distinction.

12. *The use of depleted uranium weapons has come under international scrutiny in recent years due to significant concerns about the long term health consequences of their use. If your party forms the next government, what will Canada's policy be on the use of depleted uranium weapons? What will be Canada's position on providing technical and financial assistance in order to aid decontamination of affected states and reduce the risks to civilians?*

NDP Response: The NDP recognizes the serious concerns that have been expressed by Canadian Forces personnel and others about depleted uranium. At the 2013 NDP policy convention, the party committed to reviewing outstanding grievances of CF and RCMP veterans who have been exposed to occupational hazards, including depleted uranium, to see where departmental benefits and services can be applied.

We recall the 2007 resolution of the United Nations First Committee urging member states to re-examine the health hazards posed by the use of uranium weapons, as well as the NDP's repeated calls for a comprehensive and transparent investigation into the potential risks of depleted uranium weapons by the Department of National Defence. We further note that Canadian uranium exports should only be used for peaceful purposes, in line with existing bilateral agreements governing Canadian uranium exports.

As with landmines and cluster munitions, Canada should offer our technical expertise and financial ability to support in decontamination efforts when chemical, biological, or radiological contamination has occurred, including as a result of military activities.

13. *Legal protection for the environment during and after armed conflict lags far behind that afforded to it during peacetime. Yet during conflict the potential for environmental damage, and with it serious consequences for the civilian population, is vast. If your party forms the government after the 2015 election, how will Canada work to minimise environmental damage from conflict and military activities and mitigate the humanitarian risks they pose?*

NDP Response: The devastating environmental consequences of conflict are clear, from the destruction of forests to the overexploitation of mineral resources to the contamination of water and soil. The environmental impacts of conflict must be mitigated while fighting is taking place, and addressed once peace is restored. Environmental rehabilitation should be included in planning for peacebuilding operations, since a healthy environment is essential for a strong society and productive economy.

In addition to supporting these conservation and rehabilitation efforts, Canadian policy should also recognize that environmental crises, including catastrophic climate change, can provoke and exacerbate conflict as competition escalates over scarce resources. An NDP government would acknowledge and incorporate this two-way interaction between environment and conflict in government security programming.

14. *The International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict was launched in May 2012 by a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to combating the scourge of sexual and gender violence in conflict. This effort has been widely supported by governments including at the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. If your party forms the next government, how would you demonstrate your support for ending the use of sexual and gender violence in conflict? What concrete steps would you take to further your goals?*

NDP Response: The NDP is committed to fully implementing Canada's Action Plan on Women's Peace and Security, in conformity with UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, and 1889. This includes recognizing the needs and capacities of women and girls and incorporating these in Canadian and multilateral responses to conflict; acknowledging rape and other sexual violence in conflict as a tactic of war; supporting UN peace operations that specifically address the risk of sexual and gender violence; and including the perspectives and involvement of all sexes and genders in Canadian and multilateral efforts to address and resolve conflict.

From the outset of debate on Canada's role in responding to ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the NDP called for the Canadian government to increase assistance in areas where Canada has the expertise to make a real impact, including aiding victims of sexual violence and supporting the investigation and prosecution of war crimes such as rape.