# The killing will not stop when the war ends

Jody Williams
Nobel Peace Prize for 1997



*"Dear Mom and Dad:*
*Sometimes, when we love someone and they get hurt and suffer, we are sure that we could change everything for the better for them – if only we knew the magic word! I wish I could find this magic word for you and Stephen. But after forty-three years, it is clear that there is no such magic word for him. He never was and never will be a Helen Keller, and unfortunately, nobody can tell what makes a Helen Keller and what makes a Stephen Williams.*
*But my experience with my brother led me to my way of life and enabled me to help many, many human beings. Even though it did not help Stephen, his pain and his suffering has given rise to joy and life, something that would probably not have happened without him. Through him, the life of others, who do not even know him, was changed for the better – forever.*[257]

*With deepest love,*
*Jody"*

# From Farmhouse to Fame

When a young woman on her way to work leaves the subway in Washington D.C. in 1981, somebody presses a flyer into her hand which invites to attend an event on the involvement of the USA in the civil war in El Salvador. This is the start of a career as peace activist that has found its temporary peak in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1997.

At that time, Jody Williams, as the young woman from Vermont is called, works as a secretary for a temporary office help company in the US capital. For quite some time, she has been interested in social matters. At an early age she experienced what injustice means when she saw how school pals harassed her handicapped brother. Her mother came down with measles during the first three months of her pregnancy with Stephen and he was born deaf. Later, he became "difficult" and violent. It takes thirty years before the young man is diagnosed with schizophrenia. These difficult times and her brother's hard fate hone her sense for every type of injustice: *"I get very upset when a strong person is mean to a weak one"* – a characteristic she shares with many Vermonters. In this State with about six hundred thousand inhabitants, there are three hundred basic activist groups.



After reading the flyer, Jody begins to cooperate with various Human Rights campaigns in Central America which intend to change US policy in these regions. She works on a medical aid project for El Salvador, teaches English as a second language in Mexico, is co-coordinator of the Nicaragua-Honduras training project and leads several delegations gathering information on site in those countries.

A call from Robert Muller, President of the Foundation of Vietnam Veterans in the fall of 1991 focuses her attention on a new topic, namely the devastating destructive power of landmines, long after the parties in the conflict have set their signatures on the peace treaty. Bobby Muller and his comrades want to do more than merely provide prostheses for the victims of mines. It is their objective to convince governments that the mines have to be cleared away *before* they can release their destructive force and maim innocent people. The acquaintance of Jody and Robert results in an exemplary campaign which soon has more than one thousand member organizations and which brings about a momentous change in the fight against landmines in a minimum of time (less than six years). The *International Campaign to Ban Landmines* (ICBL) achieves

a highly motivating partial victory in its first year of existence: the Democrat senator Patrick Leahy passes a bill that bans the export of US landmines.

# Persuasion work

When she hears the news of the Nobel Peace Prize which has been awarded in equal parts to her and the ICBL one day after her birthday, Jody Williams spontaneously comments that she would like nothing better than to take up the phone and call President Clinton. Clinton is said to be an advocate of the campaign, but he was unable to have the USA ratify the treaty to ban landmines.

Even Boris Yelzin got carried away and stated on the day of the Nobel Prize announcement that Russia would sign the treaty – which has not happened so far.



Jody Williams is untiring in her efforts to persuade people of her vision of a mine-free world. For instance in South Korea to which she appeals on a trip to the Olympic Summer Games that the country join the Ottawa Convention. Mines were not necessary for national security. The same as the USA, South Korea has refused to sign the agreement for a long time. The government alleges that mines are necessary to secure its borders to Communist North Korea with which it is still at war after the war of 1953. Some tender hope arises: According to *Human Rights Watch*, members of the Seoul government in conversations with Jody Williams hint at the possibility that South Korea might join the treaty some day. In response, the resolute fighter asks that South Korea publish a clear time schedule for signature if this statement was to be taken seriously.

Russia and China also allege security concerns. The innumerable rebel groups in regional conflicts do not set forth any reasons at all. They use landmines wherever they can; for them, it is the cheapest and most destructive weapon.

Jody Williams does not mince her words either vis-à-vis her own country. At every possible opportunity – and as a Nobel laureate she gets many of them – she points out that the USA is one of the last large powers not to have ratified the treaty of Ottawa. Neither does she shrink from naming nations that have accepted the treaty but are violating it repeatedly. Angola, for instance, is one of the one hundred and thirty contracting states, but continues to use mines; similar suspicious facts exist against Burundi and Sudan. Time and again, Williams refers to the shocking

numbers hiding sickening fates: China stores close to one hundred and ten million mines, Russia sixty to seventy millions; in Bosnia and Croatia there are between one and two million live landmines. In Afghanistan, one of the most thoroughly mined countries of the world, eight of ten injured victims bleed to death before they receive medical help. In almost forty percent of the cases of mine victims recorded by the ICRC in 1991 and 1992, both legs had to be amputated. No country has as many amputees caused by mine accidents as Cambodia – about four thousand, or one of every two hundred and forty inhabitants. These weapons are cowardly and perfidious; some experts cynically call them "the world's cheapest soldiers." Mines need neither food nor sleep, nor do they claim any pay. The days from December 3 to 5, 1997 must have been especially exciting for Jody Williams. The nations prepared to sign the treaty are meeting in Ottawa. By signing, the heads of the delegations certify that they will destroy their stockpiles of landmines within four years, that they will clear mined areas within ten years, that they will no longer produce and/or export mines, and that they will present a yearly report on the number of the remaining mines and the measures to destroy them. Jody and her comrades-at-arms are richly rewarded: One hundred and thirty nations sign, sixty of them ratify the treaty. In a speech immediately prior to the signing ceremony she says: "The course of history has been reversed; it is to be noted that we are also a superpower – a new form of superpower ... "



# Appeals to the public conscience

The partisans of the elimination of mines get an enormous boost of attention by the media-effective appearances of Diana Princess of Wales: In Angola, equipped like a professional minesweeper, and in Bosnia. This attention is necessary because: *"People have this idea that mine fields are fenced in with barbed wire, as they know them from movies on the Second World War. But this is not so,"* explains Jody Williams. *"Mines are laid where the population moves, near waterholes, along river banks, in the fields. It is totally unrealistic to assume that people will stay away from these places."*[264] Often, the mines are no longer used for military purposes but to sow terror among the civilians and to destroy the social and economic structure of entire regions long term.

Mine wars are "dirty" because they always hit the weakest who are exposed to the "small eggs" lying in wait under the surface, not to be