



By: TA | AP Insight

Poland withdraws from treaty banning antipersonnel mines



Poland will use antipersonnel as well as anti-tank land mines to defend its eastern border against the growing threat from Russia, Poland's deputy defense minister told The Associated Press on Friday, as the country officially left an international convention banning the use of the controversial weapons.

The 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty, also known as the Ottawa Convention, prohibits signatories from keeping or using antipersonnel mines, which can last for years and are known for having caused large-scale suffering among civilians in former conflict zones in countries including Cambodia, Angola and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Poland, which ratified the document in 2012 and completed the destruction of its domestic anti-personnel mine stockpile in 2016, withdrew from the treaty on Friday and says it plans to renew manufacturing weapons.

"These mines are one of the most important elements of the defense structure we are constructing on the eastern flank of NATO, in Poland, on the border with Russia in the north and with Belarus in the east," Paweł Zalewski, Poland's deputy defense minister, said.

He said Poland needed to defend itself against Russia, a country which "has very aggressive intentions vis a vis its neighbors" and which itself never committed to the international land mine ban treaty.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, nearby countries have been reassessing their participation in the international treaty.

Last year, Warsaw joined **Finland**, the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and Ukraine to **announce it would leave the treaty**.

Russia is one of nearly three dozen countries that have **never acceded** to the Ottawa treaty, alongside the United States.

Poland vows to make its own mines

Zalewski said that Poland will begin domestic production of both antipersonnel and anti-tank land mines, adding that the government would cooperate with Polish producers. He said Poland was aiming for self-sufficiency.



Poland will soon have the ability to mine its eastern borders within 48 hours in case of a threat - Donald Tusk

Land mines are an explosive weapon that's placed on or just under the ground and blows up when a person or a vehicle crosses over them.

Anti-tank mines, which are designed not to be triggered by a person's weight, are not forbidden by the Ottawa Convention.

Speaking on Thursday after attending a demonstration of Bluszcz, an unmanned vehicle designed to distribute anti-tank mines produced by Polish company Belma S.A. and a military research institute, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said Poland would "soon" have the ability to mine its eastern borders within 48 hours in case of a threat.

Given the length of the country's eastern borders, Zalewski said, "a lot" of land mines will be needed.

Realistic threat of Russian aggression

Poland plans to prepare mine stockpiles as part of the so-called **Eastern Shield**, a system of enhanced fortifications Poland has been building on its borders with Belarus and Russia since 2024, Zalewski said.

But he said that Poland would only deploy the mines along its borders “when there is a realistic threat of Russian aggression.”

We have to use all means to deter Russia – Paweł Zalewski

“We very much respect our territory and we don’t want to exclude it from day to day use for the Polish citizens,” Zalewski said.

Human rights groups have condemned moves to withdraw from the Ottawa Convention, arguing that anti-personnel mines are too dangerous to civilians.

But Zalewski responded that the country is striking a balance by keeping the mines in reserve unless the country faces attack.

“We are not an aggressive country,” he said, “but we have to use all means to deter Russia.”