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TREATY TO BAN LAND MINES // 10TH ANNIVERSARY

'Where's Canada's leadership in global issues?'

Honoured for spearheading weapons ban, Nobel laureate Jody Williams chastises Ottawa for 'taking a back seat' in world affairs

BY GLORIA GALLOWAY OTTAWA

Nobel laureate Jody Williams will be in Canada this week to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the treaty to ban land mines but she is far from impressed with this country's recent efforts to promote world peace.

"My personal message would be 'Where's Canada's leadership in global issues right now?'" Ms. Williams said in a telephone interview yesterday from her home in Virginia.

"Challenging the world over 10 years ago to negotiate a mine-ban treaty within the year was serious leadership on the part of the Canadian gov-

ernment. And it was very risky. And they carried it off."

But that kind of leadership does not seem to exist today, she said. "For example, there is a new initiative that should bring about a convention on cluster munitions by the end of May, 2008, and Canada is noticeably not leading in this initiative."

Canada did sign on last February to an international process to protect civilians from the impact of the massive packs of bomblets that have been used to deadly effect in Iraq, Kosovo and Lebanon but it was not among the first group of 30 countries to join

the fight.

"You are really taking a back seat and it's really kind of hard to understand," Ms. Williams said.

With land mines, Canada led the way.

As did Ms. Williams. She and her organization, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for the work they did to end the use of the weapons.

During her visit to Canada she will meet with parliamentarians about the situation in the Darfur region of Sudan and she will give a public address tomorrow entitled Cana-

da and the World.

Ms. Williams had arranged a meeting a month ago with Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier but Mr. Bernier's officer called last week to cancel. A spokesman for the minister said yesterday that there were "scheduling conflicts" and that a meeting had instead been arranged with parliamentary secretary Deepak Obhrai. The spokesman would not elaborate on the nature of the scheduling conflicts.

But Ms. Williams is still looking forward to the trip and the opportunity to mark the anniversary of the so-called Ottawa process to end land mines that

took place Dec. 3 and 4, 1997.

Her speech is likely to touch on what she considers to be a unreasonably close relationship between the Conservative government of Stephen Harper and U.S. President George W. Bush.

For instance, Ms. Williams is perplexed by Canada's decision to prevent peace activists Ann Wright and Medea Benjamin from entering the country earlier this year.

"Their biggest offence is that they have publicly stated their opposition to Mr. Bush's war," she said.

In previous years, she said, Canada took its own stands -

one of which resulted in the land-mines ban.

"What was demonstrated with the Ottawa process which brought about the mine-ban treaty," Ms. Williams said, "is that when countries that have a different view about our security threats in the world come together and work with civil society, they don't need the so-called important powers to do good in the world."

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Send your questions for Nobel laureate Jody Williams now and join her online for a live discussion Friday at noon EST.