

## ICBL Statement on Clearing Mined Areas

Madame President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mine Ban Treaty held out a hope to countless people that soon – “as soon as possible” as the treaty says – their land would be cleared of antipersonnel mines and they would no longer fear for their lives when walking to their school, market, water source, or farmland. One of the many successes of the treaty has been the high number of mine-affected countries that joined – binding themselves to clear all mined areas in their territory in less than ten-years. The first decade has now passed, and 16 [CHK] previously mine-affected states have been able to declare themselves free of mines. We warmly congratulate Albania, Greece, Rwanda, Serbia, and Zambia for their recent announcements of completion before their deadlines. This is living up to the letter and the spirit of the convention!

On the other hand 40 [update – 35?] States Parties are still engaged in demining - some with a sense of urgency equal to the need; others with a lack of progress and commitment that is extremely disappointing. No one expected that 19 states would request more time for demining, and the Review notes that such a number was inconsistent with the treaty’s obligation to clear mined areas “as soon as possible.” Many states fell behind due to a lack of international support. But there are others that have simply started too late, have been plagued by mismanagement, or have not received the requisite financial or political support from their own government. The Cartagena Action Plan also reminds States Parties that only those facing “exceptional circumstances” should be seeking an extension.

We believe there should also have been mention in the Review and the Action Plan of the need for states submitting extension requests to only seek the shortest number of years absolutely needed. For all states receiving extensions, we believe that the time planned for completion should be under regular review with an aim to keeping it as short as possible.

Vigilance needs to continue even after extensions are granted to ensure states do not need additional extensions and that they meet the goal – as suggested for many at the 9MSP - of finishing faster than the time granted. Of the 15 States Parties that received extensions last year, at least 7 already appear to be behind on the plans they submitted in their requests. Based on currently available information, Croatia has only released around 60% of what it predicted for 2008, and looks likely to release only around 65% of its 2009 target. Due to a lack of political and promised financial support, Thailand was only able to clear 3% of its target for 2009 by the middle of the year. On the other hand, at least 6 states do appear to be on track, such as Jordan and Nicaragua.

If fully implemented, the Cartagena Action Plan can help get states back on track to clearing the land quickly and safely. First and foremost, States Parties need to know what the extent of the problem is, and Action 14 therefore calls on them to identify the precise locations of all remaining mined areas by the 10<sup>th</sup> MSP. This may be difficult, but we encourage states to rise to this challenge because effective planning and operations depend

on having this knowledge. Adapting the new IMAS on land release into national standards, policies and procedures as called for in Action 16 will help. We also call on States Parties to ensure any future surveys gather such precise information.

Getting accurate data will be facilitated by Action 17, which calls on states to supplement the usual reports on number of mines cleared with much more useful information on how much land has been returned for productive use. This information will be most useful when broken down by the method of release: be it clearance, technical survey or non-technical survey, as the Action also requires.

The Action Plan and Review also remind States Parties that once mined areas are identified, all of them must be cleared, not just those with immediate impact on populations, though of course those areas should be the highest priority for clearance. We still see some states mention "impact-free" or "mine-safe" as an end result for their mine clearance programs, and we still see some donors using the same terms to describe the goal of their support, although this is less than what the treaty requires.

The requirement also applies to border zones and areas around security installations. Failing to clear these areas might – as the Review notes – indicate ongoing use and therefore a violation of Article 1. The ICBL strongly encourages States Parties that are delaying clearance of mined areas along contested borders to make all possible efforts to arrange for clearing of the entire area without linking it to eventual delineation of the border. Making use of a neutral third party to conduct the clearance may be one way to ensure the work is done in a way that gains the confidence of both sides.

Finally, the Review and Action Plan reflect developments in mine risk education methodologies, noting that risk education should be tailored to the specific situation of the population and use community liaison to ensure there is two-way communication. An important lesson learned that is not well articulated in the Review or the Action Plan is the need to find viable alternatives for those who take risks knowingly in order to eke out a living or to acquire food or fuel for their families.

Of course, through all areas of mine action, the specific needs and priorities of women and girls must be taken into account, as well as the information they hold on mined areas, or they may not be able to benefit from and contribute to risk education, clearance, or released land on an equal basis with men and boys, as is reflected in the Action Plan.

Madame President, the Landmine Monitor estimated that there are around 3,000km<sup>2</sup> of land remaining to be cleared around the world. We call on States Parties to come away from Cartagena with renewed energy and commitment to tackling this large, but manageable remaining challenge. It will take time, resources, and hard work, but it is doable. It is "mission possible," and it is a mission that will save lives.