

Overview of the Status of the Mine Ban Treaty in South Eastern Europe: The Views of the ICBL

The ICBL is pleased to participate in the Tirana Workshop on Achieving a Mine-Free South Eastern Europe. We have been asked to present our views on how close we are to such a mine-free world in this region, and we have done so using data from our research arm, the Landmine Monitor. The overview in this region is generally positive, with solid progress made by many states, especially our host Albania. But there remain huge challenges to overcome, especially in the areas of mine clearance in some countries that are among the most heavily contaminated by antipersonnel mines in the world.

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We would like to start by defining what we mean by South Eastern Europe for the purposes of this presentation. We used the list of invitees for the workshop, which includes states from outside what is normally known as Southeastern Europe (the Former Yugoslav states plus Albania) to include Greece, Turkey, and the states of the southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia). There are also two regions that have proclaimed independence but are not internationally recognized as states: Kosovo and Nagorno-Karabakh.

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From a universalization perspective, all of the states in this region are part of the Mine Ban Treaty except for the 3 states of the southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia). There have been some positive steps taken by these states that show their general support for the principles and activities of the convention, including annual votes on the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the universalization and implementation of the Convention by all 3 states and regular participation in Mine Ban Treaty meetings.

Azerbaijan has submitted voluntary transparency reports for the past two years, and Armenia has signaled interest in doing the same. Such reports are another signal of states not party's support for the treaty as they offer information on their status and activities relative to the treaty's provisions. All three states not party engage in mine clearance, and Azerbaijan conducts community-based risk education alongside clearance efforts. Staying outside the treaty means that they are less likely to attract international cooperation and assistance for mine action. In Azerbaijan, has made significant progress in VA planning and provision of services.

On the other hand, we still face challenges in ensuring respect for the norm of the mine ban, with unconfirmed allegations of use of anti-personnel mines during the 2008 conflict in Georgia and continuing reports of use of mines by non-state armed groups in Turkey. Any reports of new laying of landmines is of course alarming and we must all cooperate to ensure that it stops.

Given the overall positive disposition to the treaty by the non-states parties, we strongly encourage them to take the next logical step forward and join the Mine Ban Treaty. We hope they will attend the Cartagena Summit and announce there a timeline for acceding to the Convention.

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Turning to implementation issues, the region varies from almost full implementation of some treaty obligations to significant challenges in meeting others. Stockpile Destruction is a good example of the wide divergence in implementation. Seven States Parties in the region destroyed their stockpiles before their 4-year deadline, with Serbia being the last to finish in 2007, almost a year before its deadline. On the other hand, Greece and Turkey missed their 1 March 2008 deadline with millions of mines remaining in their stocks, representing (along with Belarus, which also missed this deadline) the first serious cases of non-compliance of the Mine Ban Treaty. Although they are now in the process of destroying tens of thousands of mines per month, they still have not finished destruction, nor do they have a fixed date for when it will be done.

Four States Parties in the region – Turkey, Greece, and Croatia - are among those keeping the highest number of mines for mine clearance destruction or technology development, with Turkey keeping over 15,000 mines. We encourage all States Parties keeping mines for training and development to review regularly this number to ensure it is the minimum number strictly required for these reasons and to clearly report on past and planned use of such mines. So far Croatia, Serbia and Turkey are the only states that report on how the retained mines are being used through their annual transparency report. Bosnia has also reported on tens of thousands of mines over the past decade that have been collected from the population or found in caches and subsequently destroyed.

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Implementation of Article 5 of the treaty on mine clearance also presents a diverse picture in this region. On the positive side, we see States Parties with limited contamination doing their best to tackle the problem “as soon as possible,” as the treaty required, with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia reporting completion of clearance duties in 2006, Albania just about finished clearance, Greece and Serbia close to completion long before their deadlines, and Montenegro almost, if not already, finished with clearance.

On the other extreme, both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia still have hundreds of square kilometers of suspected mined areas. Both countries requested and received 10 year extensions to their 1 March 2009 deadlines at the 9th Meeting of the States Parties. They both put forward 10 year plans to finish clearance, but it is not clear that such plans were realistic, and both are already behind in their implementation. One of the problems facing both states is the difficulty they are having in identifying exactly how much land they have left to clear. They are both working on the basis of early landmine surveys that largely overstated the level of contamination, and translating that data on suspected hazardous areas into exact perimeters of mined areas is a difficult task. But 10 years after joining the treaty, they should be able to provide such information, which is, after all, central to their ability to clear the land efficiently. In addition, while mobilizing sufficient resources has been a challenge for all States Parties, Bosnia-Herzegovina is struggling most with an inability to match their ambitious annual targets with adequate funding.

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Albania, B-H, Croatia and Serbia have been part of the group of 26 states with the greatest number of landmine survivors. Albania is unique in having set SMART goals for the 2005-2009 period and in having made significant progress in fulfilling them within the timeframe it set out for itself. BiH developed a mine action strategy for 2009-19 that includes a VA sub-

strategy and it is expected to see positive changes it brings. Croatia and Serbia are relying on other health and disability services to provide victim assistance. However, Handicap International's Voices from the Group report noted that survivors in Serbia thought that services had declined over the past 5 years. Slovenia, as a significant donor from this region, has made an effort to target 15% of the ITF's funding to victim assistance.

Several countries in this region are also affected by cluster munitions. We urge those states to sign and ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions and see the strong victim assistance provisions as a way to further improve their efforts to improve the lives of survivors, their families and communities.

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All of the States Parties in the region submitted their annual transparency report in 2009. As we will hear more about later today, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia have all implemented Article 9 of the convention by passing national implementation measures. Greece, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Turkey have stated that their existing laws were sufficient.

As we can see from this brief overview, the road to a mine-free world is still long in this region, as it is around the world. But in general we see states in this region showing the energy and commitment to the treaty that is needed to reach this goal. We hope that states will do all they can to make even more progress before the 2nd Review Conference and will arrive in Cartagena with concrete plans to fulfill their treaty obligations as soon as possible thereafter.

Thank you.