

Third Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty Maputo, Mozambique



Statement on Mine Clearance 24 June 2014

Thank you Mr/Ms Chair.

The international mine action community has made significant strides towards putting an end to the suffering caused by antipersonnel mines. A humanitarian crisis has, in the overwhelming majority of cases, been successfully reduced to a development problem.

Twenty-seven states and one other area have declared themselves compliant with Article 5 since the Mine Ban Treaty entered into force, and more do so with every passing year. Today, 56 states plus three other areas still have an identified threat from antipersonnel mines. Of these, thirty-two are parties to the Mine Ban Treaty.

The Mine Ban Treaty is truly a landmark in humanitarian disarmament and a model for effective action in tackling weapons with indiscriminate effects. Thus far, however, implementation of Article 5 has been a rocky road in far too many states, despite generous support from donors, a generalized willingness to innovate and learn among demining practitioners, and a “toolbox” promoted as offering a tool for every demining challenge.

Today at the Third Review Conference, we have an opportunity to take stock. Yes, to celebrate achievements and progress, but first and foremost to set a firm direction for the remainder of the decade. The ICBL has challenged all States Parties to complete their Article 5 obligations within a decade of the Third Review Conference, a goal that can be met. If efforts are well directed to areas of actual mine contamination, we should be left with only a handful of affected states in five years’ time. Out of this handful of states, we are confident that every State Party with contamination can finish clearing their known mined areas by 2025, barring armed conflict that prevents access, if operators, donors, and national authorities employ the right resources in the right way.

This is a reasonable goal, it is doable, and states should not be afraid to make this ambition clear in the Maputo Action Plan. We have heard a few voices raising doubts about whether this 2025 target should be mentioned in the outcome documents, especially in the Maputo Action Plan. The ICBL would like to offer a few thoughts on this point. First, all current mine-affected States Parties have legal clearance deadlines that fall before 2024, so they should already be planning for completion within the decade even if they have the legal right to seek more time. Second, the 2025 date would not be an impediment to bringing more states on board the treaty as it only applies to current States Parties. Any new state joining after this Conference would simply have its legal deadline to respect.

Finally, we find such a lack of vision deeply disappointing. Do those states speaking out against the 2025 goal *not* want to see all States Parties finish their Article 5 duties by then? Do they *not* hope that states will work harder and better on cleaning up this most dangerous legacy of war? And if it is about their own lack of drive to finish clearance within a decade, could they not refrain from blocking an ambitious vision for everyone else?

We keep hearing about the so-called risks of including the goal. States should also consider the real humanitarian impact of not working our hardest to finish by this time.

We believe it is technically possible for all States Parties to meet the 2025 challenge. But in order for this to happen in several states, things will need to change.

States will need to prioritize mine action – in their development goals, through national funding, and politically. Indeed the primary obstacle to effective and efficient clearance of mined areas is often not funding *per se*, much less the weather or difficult terrain, but lack of political will and prioritization to get the job done.

Mine Action Centers will need to task operators to focus on truly contaminated land, starting with areas with the highest impact on communities. In an effective mine action program, survey capacity is put front and center. Find the mined areas, and the most difficult part of the demining task has been achieved. To do so, however, requires qualified and trained surveyors who combine knowledge of demining with community liaison skills and a good understanding of risk management. We have enough collective experience in survey that there should be absolutely no more clearing of land with no evidence of mine contamination.

States reporting on mine action progress have been hindered by basic failures in mine action data management; yet fixing these failures has not always been accorded the priority it would merit. It is simply astonishing that still far too many operators, let alone the states in which they conduct mine action operations, are unable to disaggregate land release into cancellation of mined areas by non-technical survey, reduction by technical survey, and release by clearance -- or even to distinguish battle area clearance from mine clearance. Every mine action program should be able to do this at the click of a button. In any event, donors should always demand such disaggregated data, and they should receive it.

Certain national and international mine action programmes incorporated gender issues at different levels, such as taking the needs and priorities of men, women, girls and boys into consideration when planning survey, clearance operations, and handover activities -- and including women in mine action teams. Some also present sex and age disaggregated data, while others intend to use such data to inform programming. While these represent important first steps to achieving gender mainstreaming in mine action, more progress is needed to make sure interventions benefit all.

With these challenges in mind, the ICBL welcomes the development of a Committee on Clearance. We believe that the committee's mandate -- to pay greater and more systematic attention to progress by mine-affected States Parties -- will help shine the spotlight on these issues.

Mr/Ms Chair -- We are a community used to, and in fact thriving on, challenges, including the original one to create the ban in the first place. People who were cynical then were proved wrong. We got the ban in record time, and the world is much better off for the ambition and foresight the ban community had. A similar ambition should drive clearance work beyond this conference, so that we can collectively declare completion of the Article 5 challenge.

Thank you.