

Landmine survivors welcome progress at global mine-ban meeting but say much more to be done as casualty toll continues to rise

(Phnom Penh, Friday 2 December 2011): A global conference on the worldwide landmine ban has concluded, with states announcing both promising progress and worrying setbacks in their efforts to eradicate landmines.

“In 1997 we won a treaty. But only when all people in mine affected areas can live in dignity, when no more mines threaten their lives, when no one produces or lays new mines, have we truly won,” said Song Kosal, Cambodian landmine survivor and Youth Ambassador of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

Cambodian landmine survivors perform elegant traditional dance before delegates at the 11MSP, celebrating the mine ban movement in Cambodia (c) Giovanni Diffidenti

Close to 100 governments, international organizations, civil society and survivors from Cambodia and around the world gathered in Phnom Penh this week at the 11th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty.

Their aim was to assess progress made and challenges remaining on the road to reaching a mine free world.

Alongside the States Parties, 15 states not party to the ban, including the United States and Myanmar, participated in the conference.

“This week we heard some heartening news from states on what they are doing to clear contaminated land, destroy stocks of mines, and provide better assistance to victims. But it was not enough – we need governments to do more to work in partnership with civil society to achieve this mission, said Kasia Derlicka, Director of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

In Cambodia, where thousands of people live with the daily threat of mines, the shocking reality of the danger they still pose is all too clear. Just yesterday, Thursday 1 December 2011, six people were injured in Cambodia’s Pursat Province when the truck they were in triggered a landmine.



Steve Goose, with the ICBL since it began, and head of the campaign's delegation at the 11MSP, delivers a statement celebrating 20 years of the mine ban movement (c) Giovanni Diffidenti

This is not an isolated problem – people are killed or injured by landmines all over the world every week. During the conference it was also reported that three people had been killed and six seriously injured in three separate landmine accidents in Bosnia.

Among key announcements at the meeting welcomed by the ICBL were:

- A ministerial announcement that Finland – the only European Union country other than Poland member not to have banned landmines – would accede to the Mine Ban Treaty in the coming weeks, bringing the total number of states onboard the treaty to 159;
- Somalia indicating it is going to join the treaty in the coming months;
- Burundi's declaration that it is now mine-free, after clearing all its mined land way ahead of its April 2014 deadline, bringing the total number of countries declared mine-free to 19;
- Turkey, previously in violation of the treaty for missing the deadline to destroy their nearly 3 million stockpiled landmines, announcing it completed destruction in June 2011;
- The United States, also not party to the ban but attending the conference as an observer, stating that their landmine policy review is "active and ongoing" and that they were "making a real progress" on whether they should join the ban.

ICBL Ambassador Tun Channareth under a model of a plane dropping cluster bombs, 20years of mine action in Cambodia exhibit. (c) Stephane de Greef

However, as the conference closed, the ICBL remained concerned with the following significant issues:

- At least three governments used mines this year: Israel, Gaddafi's forces in Libya, and Myanmar. There were also serious allegations of mine use by Syria. The ICBL strongly condemned this use, and has called on all countries here in Phnom Penh to join them in doing so;
- Three states: Belarus, Greece, and Ukraine remain in violation of the convention for failing to destroy their stockpiles of landmines by the treaty deadline;
- Five states – Algeria, Chile, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and the Republic of Congo were granted extensions to their deadlines to clear their contaminated land, bringing the total number of countries that have not been able to clear land by their deadline and needed extension, to 27;
- New evidence of possible antipersonnel mine contamination has arisen in four States Parties: Germany, Hungary, Mali, and Niger, all of whose treaty clearance deadlines have already expired
- For the second year in a row, no mine clearance is planned to take place on the Falkland Islands. The UK has consistently failed to meet their clearance obligations under the treaty, and now have to clear more than 110 mined areas across over seven square kilometres in less than seven years;
- The majority of affected states are falling behind on their land clearance plans and targets, with only a handful being on track;
- Still more than 4,000 landmine victims are reported each year. Assistance and services for landmine survivors are insufficient and difficult to access in most states actually affected by landmines.