

Landmine Ban Makes Gains, But Serious Concerns Remain

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Landmine Ban Makes Gains, But Serious Concerns Remain *Tenth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty Concludes in Geneva* *States Reaffirm the Goal of Complete Eradication of the Weapon*

Geneva, 3 December 2010 -- Dozens of countries reported impressive progress in banning antipersonnel mines, clearing mined areas, and assisting victims of the weapon during a week-long meeting of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty in Geneva, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) said today. But four countries remained in violation of the treaty for missing their stockpile destruction deadline, and six countries needed extensions of their clearance deadlines.

Many States Parties and states not yet party to the treaty made encouraging announcements on progress made toward a mine-free world. **Venezuela** announced it has started clearance of its military bases, after neglecting to do so for the last eleven years.

"The good news is that over a decade after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty, states are still committed to reaching the goal of a mine-free world," said Sylvie Brigot, executive director of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. "But we call on states to provide sufficient funding and to make efficient and effective use of such funding and other resources to meet this goal."

In order to address the challenge of shrinking resources and competing priorities, the meeting discussed the creation of a new standing committee on cooperation and assistance --an initiative by **Zambia** that garnered wide support among meeting participants. The new committee would encourage more state-to-state cooperation - recognizing and reinforcing the ability and responsibility of all states in collaborating to meet treaty obligations.

"We commend Zambia for tabling this proposal and we hope this new initiative will help speed up mine clearance and stockpile destruction, and will ensure more sustainable support to survivors," said Eva Veble, head of the Mine Action Unit at DanChurchAid. "We need to shift from the traditional 'donor to beneficiary' approach of international cooperation, and move toward real partnerships where stakeholders jointly agree on needs and goals and regularly measure progress."

At the meeting, **Colombia** was granted an additional ten years to address its heavy landmine contamination. It must now clear all landmines on territories under its jurisdiction or control by 2021. Colombia also announced it has passed a national legislation allowing civilian organizations to undertake demining work, which should significantly speed up clearance of areas where civilian organizations can operate.

Mine clearance deadline extensions were also granted to **Chad, Denmark, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania** and **Zimbabwe**. The ICBL has expressed concern that requests for extensions have become the norm rather than the exception.

Four States Parties are still in violation of the Mine Ban Treaty for missing their four-year treaty-mandated deadline for destroying all their stockpiles of antipersonnel mines (**Belarus, Greece, Turkey** and **Ukraine**). Turkey reported it has nearly completed destruction, Belarus announced a company has been identified to destroy its remaining 3 million mines, and Ukraine announced Norway will provide funds to allow it to begin large-scale destruction of its remaining 6 million mines. Disturbingly, Greece reported that its destruction program has been suspended, with nearly 1 million mines left to destroy.

The **United Kingdom** made a worrying step back as it has been unable to announce new efforts in addressing landmine contamination in the Falkland Islands/Malvinas, and indicated that it would rather provide funding for

demining in other affected countries. So far the UK has cleared three mined areas on the Falkland Islands/Malvinas, and 113 areas remain contaminated.

"Clearing mines and providing funding to support mine action are two distinct obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty. States cannot pick and chose which one they wish to abide by," said Stuart Casey-Maslen, mine action editor of the annual report Landmine Monitor 2010. "The UK did not clear a single mine for the first nine years after joining the Mine Ban Treaty. It was then granted a deadline extension until 2019 to complete clearance of the Falkland Islands, and promised to finish the job as soon as possible. We want to see this promise come true."

Another issue of concern is that Turkey stated that its investigation into serious allegations of use of antipersonnel mines by Turkish armed forces were continuing, but could not provide any additional information.

A full day of the Geneva meeting was dedicated to assessing support to landmine survivors, their families and communities, further to the ambitious promises made by states at the 2009 Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World.

"We call on states to move on from drafting plans to actually implement them in order to make a real difference in mine-affected communities," said Firoz Ali Alizada, Treaty Implementation Officer at the ICBL and a landmine survivor himself. "Medical and social services should be accessible and affordable. And survivors and other persons with disabilities should enjoy the same economic opportunities as others, to ensure they regain their place as productive members of their communities."

The **United States** attended the Geneva meeting as an observer for the second year in a row, and announced the review of its landmine policy was still underway, without confirming any date for completing the review and deciding on whether or not to join the Mine Ban Treaty.

Russia, also attending the meeting as an observer, spoke for the first time ever at a Mine Ban Treaty meeting, saying it "did not exclude" the possibility of joining the treaty in the future. The only two European countries not yet on board the treaty, **Poland** and **Finland**, confirmed they would join the treaty in 2012.

The Eleventh Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty will take place in Phnom Penh, **Cambodia**, from 28 November - 2 December 2011. Cambodia is one of the most heavily mine-affected countries in the world and has at least 44,000 survivors of landmine injuries and many more families and communities living in mine-affected communities.