

Daily Update Monday 30 December 2009

The Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty kicked off with a truly memorable opening ceremony on Sunday evening, November 29th, which set the tone for the Conference with opening remarks, including from Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos Calderon, focusing on key issues for the implementation of the MBT, such as use of anti-personnel mines by non-state armed groups and victim assistance. The ceremony concluded with a remarkable dance performance from ConCuerpos and AZNAD Dance Companies, integrating wheelchairs and dancers in complex and provocative choreography, ranging from modern to erotic dance numbers with regional Colombian origins.

The Conference began on Monday, 30th November, with the first three days set aside to substantive work before high level statements begin on Thursday. The main objectives of the coming days will be to secure agreement on currently strong drafts of a five year review document on the operation and status of the Convention from 2005-2009, a forward looking political declaration, and the Cartagena Action Plan for 2010-2014.

Outgoing President of the 9th Meeting of States Parties, Amb. Jurg Struli of Switzerland, opened the Conference, calling for substantive work during the week to honor the commitments of States Parties, and calling for support for the Cartagena Action Plan so that the dream pursued in the last ten years can become reality in the next. Amb. Susan Eckey of Norway, President of the Cartagena Summit, welcomed participants, highlighting the need to focus on the humanitarian essence of the Convention, national ownership, and the full participation of survivors, including men, women, boys and girls, to improve the effectiveness of work and to search for sustainable solutions to the challenges before the Convention.

The Conference began with a session on victim assistance, the agenda specifically chosen to emphasize the recognition of States Parties of the need for a renewed commitment to urgently implementing victim assistance provisions under the Convention. While the inclusion of provisions for victim assistance is one of the most significant achievements of the Mine Ban Treaty, paradoxically, victim assistance is also one of the most significant challenges before the Convention.

Song Kosal, ICBL Ambassador and Cambodian survivor, together with four fellow survivors Prasanna Kuruppu, Tun Channareth, Sandra Castro, and Channeng Nek, presented their priorities for victim assistance, based on their personal experiences after their injuries, including access to education, basic rights of victims and their inclusion in policy making, and commitment for national and international funding. One survivor poignantly asked participants "What is the world's commitment to us? To the victims and their families?"

Thailand and Belgium led the victim assistance session as Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on VA. Thailand noted progress in the past 10 years in establishing a broad understanding of victim assistance and an increase in participation of experts and survivors in national delegations while Belgium stated that despite progress, the Convention had not yet fulfilled its promises to survivors. Priorities for the next five years must be intensifying efforts to ensure increased accessibility to services, fulfillment of rights, creation of strong policies, capacity building, resource mobilization and inclusion of survivors as long-term commitments. Colombia, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Uganda, Albania, Cambodia, El Salvador, Guinea Bissau, Jordan, Peru, Serbia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Senegal, Yemen, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Angola, Iraq, Australia, Canada, Bangladesh, Portugal, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, France, Chile, Algeria, Guatemala, Austria, ICRC, UNMAT, and the ICBL spoke on their experiences with a range of activities under the Convention. Many emphasized their progress at the national level, including the development of national plans for mine action and victim assistance, overwhelming support for the CPRD and synergies between the Conventions, improved trainings and physical therapy and rehabilitation programs, access, internal governmental department coordination, establishment of focal points, support for NGO and grass-root initiatives, and overall increase in service availability and quality.

Others identified key challenges impeding the implementation of victim assistance provisions, such as ensuring flexible and timely provision of assistance and overwhelming lack of resources in certain cases. States Parties identified economic and social reintegration as the most difficult aspect of victim assistance, while others such as Angola and Iraq called for assistance in establishing data collection capacity to register victims as a critical first step enabling the provision of assistance.

Several donors made compelling statements, such as Norway, which said that States Parties needed a change in pace in victim assistance efforts to work harder to ensure the realization of victims' human rights, reintegration, clear indicators for progress, and age and gender sensitive assistance, and stated that it hoped that all could look back on this Conference and see a turning point on the implementation of victim assistance. In addition Norway, along with France and Switzerland, were amongst a number of States emphasizing the need for increased synergies and integration across the frameworks of the MBT, CPRD, and CCM on victim assistance.

Two survivors included on the national delegations of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Australia made very strong statements on VA. Zeljko Volas from BiH spoke about the importance of the inclusion of survivors and building local capacity, including specifically in peer support groups and Graham Edwards from Australia emphasized the need for the provision of sufficient and sustainable funding for VA, extending beyond the borders of cities to reach survivors in rural areas.

Austria, ICRC, UNMAT, and ICBL had high praise for HI's report on victim assistance based on surveys of survivors, called Voices from the Ground, and repeatedly quoted statistics on victims' opinions on the lack of progress thus far on victim assistance, such as that only 28% of survivors thought that victim assistance had improved since the First Review Conference, while 24% believed that economic reintegration had worsened in the last five years. Austria pledged to maintain its support for VA as a donor, and noted its recent efforts as Chair of the Security Council in drafting and securing unanimous agreement on SC Resolution 1894 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which supports all aspects of VA - a considerable achievement considering the composition of the Security Council.

Firoz Ali Alizada had the last word on VA, on behalf of the ICBL, challenging participants to ask themselves, despite progress made on VA, which of the real needs of survivors were being addressed? While the MBT provided hope for survivors, plans must be translated into action immediately after the Conference, he said. Powerful aspects of VA on paper will never bring changes on the ground unless implemented in a timely fashion; won't be successful unless affected states make them a priority; and won't be sustainable unless states commit technically, politically, and financially. He urged donors to provide funding earmarked for VA, adding that with enough resources and commitment, VA was 'mission possible.'

The second session of the Conference heard requests for extensions on clearance of contaminated areas from 3 of 4 States Parties applying for extensions.

Argentina's request, to the relief of many did not result in a political argument. Argentina presented a tentative plan for demining based on a joint UK/Argentina feasibility study and cited as its reason for noncompliance its lack of free access to the Malvinas to carry out demining, as the UK has 'de facto control' of the islands. Argentina however pledged its intention to fulfill its obligations in 10 years. The UK firmly rejected Argentina's assertion regarding the sovereignty of the Islands but did not oppose Argentina's request.

Cambodia gave a lengthy powerpoint presentation detailing its clearance efforts to date, plans for the future and concrete steps and milestones, including plans for a baseline survey to clarify remaining work to be done. The discussion that ensued and questions from States Parties (Australia, Thailand, Canada, Indonesia, and Austria) demonstrated the importance placed on ensuring the absolute necessity of extensions and eligibility only in truly exceptional circumstances, necessitating a rigorous commitment from applicant states. Amb. Struli reported that after analysis of Cambodia's request, it was found that the request for an additional 10 years and the level of resources projected - an estimated 30 million USD per year with an additional 125 million for overall implementation - was reasonable but further clarification based on the baseline survey results was needed along with a national clearance plan and plan for resource mobilization. Positively, Thailand and Cambodia both demonstrated willingness to work cooperatively to find solutions to demining their contested border areas. States Parties added their concerns that work would likely exceed 10 years for completion, with ICBL emphasizing the challenges posed by what would be a 38% increase in funding, the need for RCAF accreditation and regulation, and the accuracy of current data as a reliable basis for an extension. Australia, Indonesia, and the ICBL asked Cambodia to give updated data at the 11th Meeting of States Parties and during the intersessionals in the interim. Cambodia responded pledging updated information based on the baseline survey results.

Tajikistan presented its request but the full day ended before comments could be given and extension requests will continue tomorrow.

During the packed day, five lunch time events were held:

- Landmine Monitor held a successful briefing attended by approximately 75 people, presenting key findings of the 2009 ten-year review report.
- HI hosted a side event "Good Practices on Socio-economic Inclusion," with presentations on experiences from mine affected countries, specifically El Salvador and Colombia. Presentations were followed by an active discussion with participation from survivors, persons with disabilities, and government, UN and NGO representatives. Key issues requiring further attention were a rights-based approach to inclusive development, and with regards to Latin America, socio-economic inclusion of ethnic minorities and indigenous groups.
- UNMAT hosted an event "Maintaining momentum: extraordinary successes of mine action and challenges in resource mobilization" wherein issues such as funding was considered and the UN's 2010 Portfolio of Mine Action Projects was launched.
- Norway hosted a meeting of the Resource Utilisation Contact Group on "Building partnerships for sustainable mine action."
- Survivor Corps and Centro Integral de Rehabilitacion de Colombia (CIREC) hosted an event on "Overcoming victimhood."
- Plus - a press conference with Norway, Colombia, ICRC, and ICBL

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