

Daily Update Tuesday 1 December 2009

The second day of the Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty continued the Conference's positive momentum with key developments on critical areas of implementation, especially on mine clearance.

Highlights of the day were the announcements by four States Parties - Rwanda, Albania, Zambia, and Greece - that they had completed their Article 5 obligations on clearance of contaminated areas and could now declare themselves mine-free!

Rwanda stated that it was able to complete its obligations one year ahead of its deadline to become the first mine-free country in the Great Lakes region. Albania emphasized that its success was due to building sustainable national capacity at the national and local level and to continued donor support. Zambia announced that clearance of mined areas was completed but was not resting on its laurels and stated it would continue with the challenge of clearing remaining areas contaminated with ERW and cluster munitions. Greece stated it had fulfilled its mine clearance obligations by demining its border with Turkey at a cost of 7,560,000 euro.

Another notable event of the day was a statement from the United States, which participated for the first time in a formal meeting of the Mine Ban Treaty. The US stated that "The Administration's decision to attend this Review Conference is the result of an on-going comprehensive review of U.S. landmine policy initiated at the direction of President Obama. This is the first comprehensive review since 2003. As such, it will take some time to complete, given that we must ensure that all factors are considered, including possible alternatives to ensure protection of U.S. troops and the civilians they protect around the world." The US reiterated its commitment to "continued U.S. global leadership in eliminating the humanitarian risks posed by landmines" and mine action funding, stating that "the Administration applauds the significant accomplishments to date by the Convention in addressing the harmful effects of indiscriminate landmines and is committed to a continued U.S. leadership role in humanitarian mine action."

Other positive developments included Australia's reiteration of its 2010-2014 100 million AUD pledge to mine action - the largest ever five year pledge from Australia and Germany's announcement that it will increase its direct funding for victim assistance.

The session on international cooperation and assistance as a whole however could have been stronger as Australia and Germany were the only donors who made explicit funding pledges. While many affected states intervened to emphasize the importance of cooperation and assistance, none presented clear requests for assistance or identified specific areas where assistance was required. Zambia proposed the establishment of a Standing Committee on resources, to focus attention on mobilization and efficient use of resources, supported by Senegal, Canada, the ICRC, and the ICBL. Thailand, supported by Bangladesh, proposed that a Trust Fund might be established.

And despite the attendance and statement of the US as a sign of progress in key areas towards universalization, there was little new to report during the session on universalization - an area which dedicated Canadian Chair of the Universalization Contact Group, John MacBride, said despite concerted efforts had become "tough sledding" as no new signatures have occurred in the last two years.

However, 20 non-States Parties are participating in the Cartagena Summit, showing clear engagement from those not yet able to join the Treaty. Along with the US, Mongolia, Poland, Morocco, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India gave updates on progress towards ratification:

- o Mongolia said it continues its 'step by step approach' toward joining the MBT, with a visit in July 2009 from GICHD to address the quality of its stockpiles and stated that it had a national action plan to create the necessary legal, technical, and financial framework to prepare for accession to the Convention. However, its 'step by step' approach appears to be a lengthy one with no indication of Mongolia joining in the immediate future.

- o Poland reiterated its pledge to join the MBT in 2012

o Morocco stated that accession to the Convention was a strategic objective but depended on settling the dispute in its 'southern provinces.'

o Nepal reported it was fully committed to the humanitarian objectives of the Convention, and was in favor of a mine free world, and was making progress on clearance of mined areas with support from UNMAS.

o Sri Lanka stated that large quantities of mines had been discovered in previously LTTE-controlled areas, including factories to produce mines. Sri Lanka said it was working to clear mined areas to allow for the resettlement of IDPs and redevelopment and had recently imported flail machines from Croatia and Slovenia. Sri Lanka added that it would submit a voluntary Article 7 report this coming year.

o India stated that despite the indiscriminate use of landmines and IEDs by terrorists, India's armed forces have not used mines for law and order in response to the internal security situation or as counterinsurgency measures against illegal groups. However, India gave no indication of its intention to join the MBT, while praising CCW APII as providing the appropriate legal framework with a balance of humanitarian and military considerations.

Extension requests also continued today with comments on Tajikistan's request delivered on Monday and Uganda's request considered. Tajikistan's request was met with concerns from Australia and ICBL but no explicit opposition. Uganda, which had only applied for an extension after its deadline passed was nonetheless generally supported although Australia, Canada, Switzerland, and ICBL stated their belief that clearance could be finished much more rapidly than the three years Uganda requested. In addition, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Denmark provided updates on their progress after previously requesting extensions. Bosnia and Herzegovina unfortunately announced that it was behind on clearance, while Denmark announced it was a year ahead of schedule.

While there may have been room for improvement on international cooperation and assistance and universalization, the announcements that four more countries are now free from mine contamination and free from the threat of more innocent civilians becoming victims gave a concrete sense of encouragement to all present on the success of the Convention to bring about real results that will prevent future tragedies.

During the day, the following side events were held:

o "Meeting of the Linking Mine Action and Development Contact Group," hosted by Canada. During the event, participants emphasized the importance of improving the link between mine action and development; considering mine action within the conceptual framework of development and within the framework of disability; and heard assurances from four donors (Australia, the UK, the Netherlands, and Canada) that the mine action and development concept does not mean leaving aside demining. However, the UK clearly indicated it was not likely to renew dedicated mine action funding and AusAID stated that it has a 'development' obligation and mine action therefore would need to be linked to its remit.

o DCA, ITF and Albania Mine Action Executive hosted a side event to announce Albania becoming free of landmines and cluster munitions. Arben Braha of the Mine Action Executive noted that the problem had been significant but had been solved through good partnership, planning and communication. Eva Veble of DCA noted that this achievement showed that even with a serious problem, it can be done and that DCA was proud to have been a part of the success story. The ITF congratulated the donors and highlighted the importance of long-term commitment to finishing the job. Canada commended Albania on completing its clearance obligations under two treaties. Australia congratulated Albania on its achievement and congratulated donors also, in particular for their multi-year commitments. It encouraged Albania to present lessons learned at the next intersessional meetings. CMC congratulated Albania on becoming the first country to become cluster munition free since the CCM was signed in Oslo in 2008. The US also congratulated Albania on becoming mine free, noting this was a great accomplishment and that lessons could be drawn or the continuing work on ammunition destruction.

o "What is Gender Sensitive Mine Action? Good Practices and Lessons Learned from Field Programs," hosted by UNMAT, the ICBL, and the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines. Approximately 70 people attended the side event chaired by the ICBL (Mary Wareham). The event began with presentations by the SwissCBL and five mine action practitioners with experience working in Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. The

lively discussion afterwards considered gains made in advancing the gender dimension of mine action as well as the gender sensitive aspects of the Nairobi Action Plan.

o "Promoting inclusion in humanitarian development," hosted by Switzerland

o and "Victim Assistance partnerships," hosted by Japan and Association of Aid and Relief.

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