

Third Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines, Pretoria, South Africa, 9-11 September 2009

ICBL campaigners joined the *Third Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines* in Pretoria, South Africa from 9-11 September 2009, to conduct advocacy and outreach in support of the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The Continental Conference was the fourth in a series of regional meetings convened in the lead-up to the Cartagena Summit (Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty), which will take place in Colombia in the week of 30 November 2009.

Government representatives from 30 African countries/areas attended the workshop: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Western Sahara, Zambia, Zimbabwe, as well as Colombia, Croatia, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA. African Union, European Council and European Union representatives joined the meeting, as well as the ICRC, UNDP, UNICEF and some African NGOs.

The ICBL was represented at the conference by four African campaigners: Ayman Sorour, Boubine Toure, Margaret Arach Orech and Robert Mtonga, from Egypt, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia respectively. Stan Brabant from Handicap International Belgium, an ICBL Management Committee member, also participated in the event.

At the opening of the three-day meeting, speeches were delivered by representatives of South Africa, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, the Council of the European Union as well as the Presidency of the European Union. Margaret Arach Orech delivered the ICBL opening statement, and Robert Mtonga addressed the meeting on the second day, calling on stepped-up efforts on mine clearance, victim assistance and stockpile destruction, as well as inviting the four remaining African states not party to join the treaty at the earliest opportunity.

The ICBL took part in the discussion to modify the conference's main document: An African Common Position on Anti-Personnel Landmines. Participating states shared information on progress registered and challenges that still remain for achieving a mine-free Africa. Many echoed the lack of funds or inadequate funding as a cause for delays in fulfilling their mine clearance and victim assistance obligations.

Arabic, French and Portuguese interpreters were present during the event but all written documents were available in English only, which caused frustration among francophone delegations. The lack of translated materials rendered impossible the final adoption of the common position, and it was agreed that a final version of the modified document would be sent out later to the African Foreign Ministers for adoption.

Lobbying on Cluster Munitions

ICBL campaigners seized the opportunity to lobby African countries on the signing and ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique and Namibia were approached, among others. Many of them indicated that their ratification process would take a while but that it would still be done. Issues cited as taking priority over ratification included other pressing national questions such as constitutional reviews, or upcoming elections. Malawi then deposited its instrument of ratification at the United Nations high-level event on 7 October 2009.

Media Work

The ICBL issued a media advisory and a press release in English and French, calling for increased efforts on mine clearance and victim assistance. Landmine Monitor also prepared a factsheet on landmines in the region, in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese. Margaret Arach Orech presented a short personal testimony and explained the impact of landmines on the continent during an interview with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SA FM and Channel Africa). Robert Mtonga gave interviews to AFP, SABC and IRIN, about the ICBL expectations for the Cartagena Summit, as well as the need for Egypt, Somalia, Morocco and Libya to join the treaty. Boubine Touré gave an interview to that was added to an in-depth article on the mine issue in Africa, by IRIN Senegal.

Embassy Visits

Robert Mtonga visited the embassies of the Republic of Congo, Ghana, Gabon and Niger. He discussed their preparation for the Third Continental Conference and for the Cartagena Summit, as well as the signature/ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.