

**ICBL Comments and Questions on Mine Clearance
Mine Ban Treaty Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings
Geneva, Switzerland
27-28 May 2013**



Thank you Mr. Co-Chair.

We would like to start with two general comments on mine action before raising a few country-specific comments or questions.

First, we feel the need to talk about land release again, because it appears that some states are still relying on an over-cautious presentation of the mine problem and are reluctant to use updated mine action methods. All States Parties have already agreed on the need to use the full range of technical and non-technical survey methodologies to focus in on the real mine contamination and avoid clearance of land without sufficient evidence of mines. They agreed to it via the land release paper agreed at the 9MSP, and they recommitted to doing so in the Cartagena Action Plan. Yet we still hear year after year about high levels of contamination based on old surveys done with outdated techniques. And we hear from our operator members that some states are reluctant to fully embrace Land Release methodologies and depart from the reliance on old surveys.

It is time to let go of this old-school approach, and fully embrace best practices. The mine action sector has acknowledged the need to focus clearance resource on areas that are genuinely contaminated and not conduct default clearance solely on the basis of previous survey data. Not embracing practices that can achieve the best efficiency and effectiveness in clearance serves no one's interest - not the interest of affected communities looking for mines to be removed quickly, not that of the mine action center seeking international support, and not that of the affected government that should be reporting better progress. At this point other states, including donors, want to hear how states are moving quickly towards completion by the most efficient means, not how large amounts of suspected hazardous areas mean clearance could go on for years or decades to come. Embracing Land Release methodologies is the responsible thing to do.

In addition to the development and evolution in Land Release methodologies, there has been considerable innovation within the mine action community relating to the use of mechanical assets in mine action operations. Mechanical assets, when properly integrated into operations, can rapidly increase the efficiency of operations without compromising safety. We urge all affected states to embrace innovation, update the necessary policies and standards, and to draw on the international expertise out there to help them if needed.

Our second point is a simpler one and pertains to reporting. All states that have received extensions were called upon to report back at Standing Committee meetings and MSPs on the progress they have made relative to the benchmarks they set out in their plans. These benchmarks are nicely laid out in a paper the ISU has distributed. But all too often we hear progress reports that are disconnected from such plans, making it very difficult to assess whether they are on track to meet their new deadline. So we ask states to focus their reports on progress against specific targets in their plans, and for states falling far behind such objectives, or those that submitted short-term plans that will soon expire, to submit revised plans to States Parties.

And now a few short comments and questions on the presentations heard so far:

First of all, we were very happy to learn that **Venezuela** finished its mine clearance – over a year before its extended deadline. While the amount of contamination was small, it is still positive that an extra effort was made to work faster than indicated in its plan and we urge others to do likewise.

On **Democratic Republic of Congo**, we welcome the initiative to get a better picture of contamination in a shorter timeframe. We would like to suggest that DRC provides preliminary results of these efforts at the 13MSP instead of waiting until the project is over in January 2014 since we may otherwise not have a chance to hear of progress until the Review Conference.

On **Zimbabwe**, we hope the two international NGOs offering support will be fully up and running, with all necessary authorizations, as soon as possible. We welcome planned cooperation with Mozambique, and we hope the details will be ironed out as soon as possible so clearance can get underway.

Senegal – We welcome the report of remarkable improvement in productivity in 2013, but we don't have an idea how that fits into the plans until its deadline since Senegal did not include a mine clearance plan in its original extension request in 2008. It did state at the 12MSP that it would present such a plan at the 2013 intersessional meetings, so we would appreciate if it could share a copy with this meeting.

We would also like to express our deep concern about the abduction of 12 deminers by the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance, or MFDC. The deminers are all Senegalese members of private South African demining company Mechem. Geneva Call has been meeting with the MFDC and informed us this morning that the 3 female deminers mentioned by Senegal yesterday were indeed released, which is great news. The ICBL calls for the release of the remaining deminers without further delay and encourages Senegal and the MFDC to continue their current dialogue in order to enable Senegal to meet its 2016 deadline.

We don't have comments on most of the other presentations we heard yesterday afternoon, except to note that it was rather difficult to understand progress made from several reports, even though some shared a large amount of data on slides. We would be very grateful if states could present very clearly what precise quantity of land was released in the past year, exactly how much land remains to be cleared, and whether in their view they are on track to meeting their new deadline. Specifically, we would like to ask **Algeria** and **Peru** if they would be kind enough to tell the room again how much land remains to be cleared and if they believe they will finish on time, which we did not hear in their reports.

Another specific clarification we have for **Ecuador** - did we understand correctly that it finished surveying and clearing all the areas it originally had identified, and is now just working on the areas it learned about more recently from Peru? If so, this is very good news. But again, how much is there left to do then?

On **Angola**, we have some very specific questions for clarification: 1 – We would like to hear more about what the purpose is for the mapping project in relation to clearing the remaining area. 2 – There was a discrepancy in tables on remaining areas – with one listing 1425 mined areas and another 1121 – which was the correct number? 3 – Did we hear correctly that 118km² was released in 2012? This is a great achievement. And 4 – What is the role of INAD on the land released since we only heard about work by NGOs and commercial companies.

On **Thailand**, it is positive to hear that productivity has increased so much last year, but the rate still puts Thailand far behind its projected annual achievements. So we would like call again on Thailand to present states with an updated plan taking into account the differences over the past years with planned targets. We would also like to hear more about how it is implementing LR procedures to increase productivity even further and focus on truly contaminated areas.

United Kingdom – We thank the United Kingdom for their detailed presentation on what has been achieved last year and since 2009. But we are still missing from the United Kingdom a plan for the extension period, including annual projected achievements and a budget. This would enable states to see how much should have been achieved and whether they are on target to finish on time. We would also appreciate learning exactly how much contaminated land remains and how land release procedures are expected to help reduce the amount that needs to be cleared.

Bosnia-Herzegovina – We share their concern about the lack of productivity and the fact that they are falling far behind their plan. It's good to hear there are efforts to use other technologies to increase productivity this year, but we still suggest sharing a revised plan that takes into account the achievements in the past years and a realistic view of their capacity in the coming years.

Cambodia – We thank Cambodia for their detailed presentation. Since the baseline survey results show more AP-contaminated land than in their extension request, we would like to know what portion of this land you expect to be able to release through further survey, and what will need to be subjected to full clearance. We welcome the news that release rates are good and even higher than planned. With these different factors in mind – the end of the baseline survey and the higher productivity rates – we are wondering if it will be possible to share an updated mine action plan with States Parties as committed to in your request?

Chile – we appreciate the clear picture of what has been achieved since the outset of the program, which we understand means that 15.3km² remains to be cleared. We are wondering if Chile could report on precisely what it released in the last year.

Tajikistan - Thank you for your very clear presentation on past and planned activities. As Tajikistan noted, additional resources have helped increase capacity and productivity, which is good news. We welcome your projected achievements by the end of 2015. We hope that the remaining area after 2015, which would appear to be between 1.2 and 2.7km², would require much less than five years to clear. We look forward to seeing the updated work plan now under development and hope it will show Tajikistan will finish faster than planned, as encouraged by States Parties in the decision on its request.

Colombia – We welcome the news on progress on civilian mine clearance operators, and that clearance by the military is actively underway in several municipalities. But we also understand more needs to be done to facilitate civilian deminers' operations in order to enable the level of operations projected in the extension request, and we urge Colombia to push this forward as quickly as possible. We also look forward to hearing about the revised plan for the next period at the 13MSP.

Afghanistan – We thank you for your detailed presentation, especially your resource mobilization plan. We invite other states to consider presenting similar information on resource mobilization.

We have listened to **Jordan's** report attentively and we are under the impression that many antipersonnel mines are still discovered as part of the verification exercises in the Jordan Valley and

along the Syrian border. As Jordan is aware, a new procedure for contamination discovered after deadline expiry has been adopted at the 12MSP. We would like to recommend that Jordan seriously consider the implication of this new procedure given the results of the verification exercise in both areas. We may have a different understanding of what it means to identify a mined area. For us, it sounds like the verification work is being conducted on specific areas where mines are suspected to be located, and indeed are being found, so should be considered as mined areas. In the meantime, we welcome Jordan's transparency on addressing these areas, and we appreciate the concern it has shown for the safety of its population by verifying these areas before handing them over.