

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES UPDATE ON REGIONAL STOCKPILE DESTRUCTION

COMMENTS PRESENTED BY WILLIAM A. MCDONOUGH, HEAD OF DELEGATION

STOCKPILE DESTRUCTION WORKING GROUP - THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2002

Thank you very much Mr. Co-chair!

As a regional international organization supporting landmine stockpile destruction in the Americas, the OAS appreciates the opportunity to present just a few points updating the Standing Committee on current status of our efforts in the areas of assistance and cooperation.

Although more than 120 national governments have demonstrated their intention and willingness to destroy their anti-personnel landmine stockpiles by signing and ratifying the Ottawa Convention, many of these same governments have not been able to move as quickly to carry out the process of stockpile destruction. Article 4 of the Ottawa Convention obligates each Signatory State to destroy its anti-personnel landmine stockpiles as soon as possible but not later than four years after ratification.

In the coming year, it is likely that disposal activity will increase, as the four-year deadline for destruction approaches for many of the original Convention signatories. With the urgency for action on the destruction issue building, many States Parties are likely to come to the realization that they require assistance to carry out this obligation. Article 6 of the Convention gives each State Party the right “to seek and receive assistance, where feasible, from other States Parties to the extent possible.” At the same time, Article 6 commits each State Party “in a position to do so” to provide assistance to other signatories in the destruction of their stockpiled anti-personnel mines.

In the Americas, the Organization of American States (OAS) has taken a lead role in assisting its Member States with mine stockpile destruction. One benefit of obtaining external support for a national mine stockpile destruction program is the added transparency it lends to the process. Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention does not require independent certification of mine destruction. Nonetheless, the participation of international observers provides greater credibility to the destruction process, particularly in cases where mutual confidence-building measures are important to the establishment of a climate of trust between formerly warring parties or states.

Since 1992, the OAS General Assembly has provided a mandate to the OAS Mine Action Program to assist mine-affected countries in the Americas in fulfilling their commitment to convert the Western Hemisphere into an antipersonnel-land-mine-free zone. The OAS model for mine action is based on coordination of a multilateral effort to provide OAS Member States with both technical and financial assistance in support of national mine action authorities.

At the Third Meeting of the States Parties and in earlier working group meetings, we have reported the details of over one half million stockpiled mines destroyed last year under the general title of the "Managua Challenge" which provided technical, financial and international observer support to the process.

Taking into account certain practical realities within the region of the Americas, we can understand why some of the region's States Parties have not yet completed stockpile destruction despite the desire of these parties to comply with their obligations under the Convention. Specific realities impeding the destruction process range from natural phenomena, as in the case of earthquakes and their aftermath, to the general bureaucratic processes of aligning Government, Ministry of Defense, Army and the appropriate financial and technical resources and then getting coordinated forward movement in the destruction process.

In order to overcome some of these impediments and in keeping with the OAS mandates related to conversion of the hemisphere to a mine free zone, we, the OAS in concert with the international community continue our offer of technical, financial and international observer support to the stockpile destruction process within requesting Member States.

We are currently in informal dialogue with four additional OAS Member States to ensure their awareness of the OAS capability to help advance their national stockpile destruction programs. Some of these consultations have been carried out on the margins of meetings such as this week's event. Others were conducted in Washington or in various capitals across the region. We are optimistic that we can continue to offer a complete support package into the early part of calendar year 2003.

That is the good news of our message. As always, there is bad news as well. With the closure of our cooperating donor's (Canada) fiscal year at the end of March 2003, we are uncertain whether we will be able to continue the regional offer of financial resources to support the stockpile destruction beyond that date. We will continue to offer encouragement, technical and international observer support without a limiting date.

In the broader mine action realm, we continue to work with seven regional mine affected Member States and are directly supported in those efforts by seven OAS Member States in addition to financial support provided by the international donor community.

On a global level, we join the complimentary expressions heard throughout the day regarding advances in stockpile destruction and recognize the excellent work carried out by the Standing Committee and its co-chairs in support of national stockpile destruction.

Thank you!