

**Sixth Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention  
on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and  
Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction**

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Check against delivery

It is fitting that the first Meeting of the States Parties since last year's Nairobi Summit should be held in Croatia and in a region that has recently turned a tragic page of its history, but that continues to suffer from the effects of landmines. In the Nairobi Action Plan, States Parties solemnly reaffirmed their commitment to ending this lethal legacy of conflict through "the full and effective promotion and implementation of the Convention".

The essential task of this Meeting of the States Parties, and of future meetings, is to record and ensure progress in implementing the Nairobi Action Plan in the period 2005 to 2009, and to mobilise to face the challenges ahead. These include, in particular, doing more to meet mine clearance deadlines beginning in 2009 and to improve assistance to mine victims.

We are encouraged that since the Nairobi Summit four States -- Ethiopia, Latvia, Bhutan and Vanuatu -- have adhered to the Convention. Five more States Parties -- Algeria, Bangladesh, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Uruguay -- have completed destruction of their stockpiled anti-personnel mines within their deadlines. We congratulate the concerned States Parties for these important steps. But these achievements must not lull us into a false sense of complacency.

In the Nairobi Action Plan, States Parties recognized that fulfilling their obligations will require substantial political, financial and material commitments. Yet today a creeping disengagement at national and international levels is threatening prospects for progress. Let me give just a few examples.

- While many mine-affected States Parties have witnessed a significant decline in the annual number of new mine victims since the entry into force of the Convention, the ICRC is aware of several affected States Parties that have experienced increases in mine and unexploded ordnance casualties, by up to 19% between 2003 and 2004.
- We have also observed that a number of victim assistance projects in affected countries have been forced to scale down their activities due to insufficient funding. If this trend continues in parallel with the ever-growing number of mine victims who will need care for their lifetimes, their situation could deteriorate even further.
- We are also aware that certain mine-affected States Parties that were in the last stages of fulfilling their mine clearance obligation and that had planned to declare themselves in compliance with Article 5 of the Convention at this Meeting of the States Parties, have been unable to do so due to a lack of resources to support clearance operations in 2005.

These disturbing trends may be the result of attention and resources being diverted to other more visible crises, following the tendency of the international community to react to humanitarian needs only when they reach extraordinary proportions. In a sense, this is the way the Convention came about – in response to a global humanitarian crisis gaining the attention of the world media. Although the landmine crisis is not as visible today as it was ten years ago, it has lost none of its urgency. We may have slowed the pace of destruction caused by anti-personnel mines, but we are still far from ending it. The true test of our commitment to this goal is whether we -- governments, international agencies and civil society -- can remain sufficiently engaged outside of the public spotlight and in the absence of the sense of drama that characterised the early years of the mine ban campaign.

The Nairobi Review Conference noted that, while the annual number of new mine victims has fallen in most mine-affected States Parties, it is not yet possible to record an overall improvement in the situation of landmine survivors. Although the ICRC is treating more mine victims today than ever before, we have observed that resources and opportunities for mine survivors remain woefully inadequate, both on a global level and in most of the countries in which we work. We are encouraged by the efforts made this past year by the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance to facilitate implementation by the 24 States Parties with the greatest number of mine victims to care for. This work must intensify even further in the coming years so that the Second Review Conference can conclude that the Convention has

finally improved the lives of mine survivors, in addition to reducing the numbers of new mine victims globally.

Likewise, until mined areas are cleared, mine risk reduction and education programmes will need to be enhanced to prevent new casualties. Faced with the magnitude of the task of clearing mines and with donor fatigue, some mine-affected States Parties may be tempted to set goals that fall far short of clearing all mined areas as required by Article 5 of the Convention. If States Parties give in to this temptation, they would put the Convention at great risk. We must never forget that the Convention is as much a treaty for the elimination of a weapon as it is a humanitarian and development initiative.

As emphasised in the Nairobi Action Plan, while mine-affected States Parties have the greatest responsibility to clear mined areas and to ensure that their health and social services systems are able to care for victims, they also have the greatest needs and expectations for assistance. Two prerequisites to fulfilling these needs can be drawn from the Nairobi Action Plan:

- First and foremost, governments of mine-affected countries must assume greater responsibility for the planning and implementation of mine clearance and victim assistance programmes. While the support of international agencies is very important, it is bound to fail in the long-run if governments do not take ownership of their problem.
- Secondly, donors must support mine-affected countries that take ownership of their problems and clearly articulate their plans and needs.

While "mainstreaming" of mine action into existing humanitarian and development budgets and programmes is important, it must result in real increases in funding, commensurate with mine clearance and victim assistance needs. It should be noted in this context that annual funding for mine action worldwide -- estimated at some 200 million US dollars -- is quite a modest sum when compared to the scale of the problem and to the socio-economic damage caused each year by landmines. As we approach 2009, it is now clear that without a significant increase in human, technical and financial resources from all States Parties -- both mine-affected and donor States -- many mine-affected States Parties are unlikely to meet their deadlines and the situation of mine victims cannot be expected to improve significantly.

The ICRC pledges to continue its efforts to work with national and local authorities to provide better care for mine victims, to help mine-affected communities prevent new casualties and to promote the universalization and implementation of the Convention. We will do so with the same vigour and determination as in the past.

As anyone who has observed mine clearance knows, it is a slow, dangerous and tedious task. It requires absolute concentration, the right tools and courage under adverse conditions. Likewise, the full and effective implementation of this unique Convention demands of each of us absolute concentration, mobilising the necessary tools, and courage under challenging circumstances.

There is an exciting untold story behind every mine cleared and destroyed: the story of a child playing freely and securely; the story of a woman reaping her crops and returning home safely to feed her family; the story of confidence built between former warring parties. For every mine survivor cared for and reintegrated into society, there is the story of a life carried on with mobility and restored dignity. These success stories are unfolding quietly every day, as the seeds sown by the Convention begin to take root and grow. For the sake of those living these stories, it is essential that this Meeting of the States Parties increase the collective mobilisation in favour of a mine-free world in the years leading to 2009, and beyond.