

ICBL statement on universalization

Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings; Geneva 23 April 2007

Almost ten years since the Mine Ban Treaty was signed, we cannot deny that the treaty has been a success, making a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities in mine affected areas in dozens of countries. Yet, this is still a work in progress and real success can only be secured through universal adherence to the treaty by states, and to the mine ban norm by non-state armed groups.

Since the 7th Meeting of States Parties, little progress has been recorded on the universalization front. Montenegro has added its name to the list of States Parties after the split from Serbia, and we are happy to welcome Indonesia here today as a state party, after completion of its ratification process in February. At the same time we wish to urge the two remaining signatories – Poland and the Marshall Islands - to follow Indonesia's example and proceed to ratification without delay. Ten years is a long time to make good on a commitment made.

Poland appears to be a textbook example of those countries continuing to put forward antiquated military arguments to justify delays in joining the Mine Ban Treaty. In the light of the current political and security context in Europe, the U-turn taken by the new government, which has backtracked on the announcement of imminent ratification made by its predecessor at the 2004 Nairobi Summit, remains inexplicable for the ICBL. Ratification is not just a formal, bureaucratic act, but rather a sign of the irrevocable commitment to share responsibility for making the world a safer place for all.

Along the same lines, Finland also stands out in the ICBL's view as a case for long overdue accession. Moreover, the ICBL is extremely worried about recent reports that Finland would be considering the purchase of cluster munitions as "alternatives" to landmines. We believe that replacing one type of indiscriminate weapon with another is simply not acceptable.

During this important year in the life of the treaty we wish to see more and more states take the bold step to forsake antipersonnel mines, and the ICBL is sparing no effort to ensure this result.

In the run up to the 8th MSP scheduled to take place in Jordan, the ICBL is putting special emphasis on promoting universalization in the Middle East – where rates of adherence to the Mine Ban Treaty remain worryingly low. In March, we visited Bahrain and Kuwait and left feeling quite optimistic about accession prospects. Indeed, it could be only a matter of months before Kuwait joins the treaty as the accession bill was approved unanimously by the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee in November 2006 and is now on the agenda for vote in the plenary. Bahrain also showed encouraging signs of openness, with both the executive and legislative expressing willingness to move the issue of accession forward. We are going to follow up closely on these two countries and others within the Gulf Cooperation Council. Indeed, we would like to see GCC area as a "mine free area" as this, in a hot and volatile region like the Middle East, could send a very powerful message to other reluctant nations.

To address long-term regional concerns, heightened by allegations of new mine use during the recent conflict in Lebanon – on top of massive use of cluster munitions – the ICBL is also planning to carry out a mission to Israel in the second part of the year.

ICBL universalization activities are not limited to the Middle East. In October 2006 we conducted a visit to Vietnam, and in March, the ICBL participated in forums promoting universalization in Southeast Asia and Central Asia.

With regard to Asia, we are particularly pleased to see here a delegation from Nepal, with whom the ICBL and its local campaign have been engaging for a number of years. In Nepal, the comprehensive peace agreement signed in 2006 between the government and Maoist insurgents incorporates the ceasefire provision prohibiting mine use and includes mine action components. Heartened by the new space opened by the peace process – also thanks to the tireless work of the Nepal CBL – the ICBL is planning a visit to Nepal before the end of the year.

Other ICBL plans for the year include a visit to India. We will also work to ensure that the UN General Assembly resolution on the mine ban treaty remains annual. Over the years the resolution has proven to be an extremely valuable advocacy tool. For many States who do not feel ready to join the treaty yet, voting in favour of the resolution represents a useful entry point to open dialogue on the issue. On 6 December 2006, 18 States not Parties voted in favour of the resolution, including Palau which had abstained in previous years. We therefore call on States Parties that have universalization concerns at heart to support the submission of the resolution on a yearly basis and to provide support and collaboration to the Presidents of States Parties Meetings in drafting and promoting the resolution.

As mentioned at the opening of this statement, promoting adherence to the Mine Ban Treaty is a necessary precondition to achieve the goal of a world free of landmines. However, it is not sufficient in and of itself, and it needs to be complemented by efforts to engage non-state armed groups which are using, producing and/or stockpiling mines. Such engagement pays off, as shown by the fact that mine use by non-state armed groups is also on the decline. Earlier this month, three rebel groups active in Burma unilaterally renounced the use of landmines by signing the Deed of Commitment promoted by Geneva Call, while others have done so in past months through ceasefires and peace agreements. The ICBL and its members will continue to engage on this issue, including in India, Pakistan, Colombia, Somaliland and Kashmir where a campaign is currently underway to obtain the unambiguous announcement of a ban on victim activated weapons by all Kashmiri political and armed opposition groups.

To conclude, the ICBL hopes that efforts for universalization will be shared and supported by States Parties in accordance to Actions 1-8 of the Nairobi Action Plan.

Thank you.