

ICBL statement on universalization

Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings; Geneva 25 May 2009

Mr. Chair,

In the course of the past half a year the ICBL and its members worldwide have engaged with a wide range of States not Party through correspondence, action alerts, embassy meetings, lobbying at international conferences, and through numerous events at national level.

On 1 March we launched our road to Cartagena, where the 2nd Review Conference of the Convention will take place, by telling the world that with enough vision, resources and energy of States, NGOs and other stakeholders, a 'mine-free world' is 'Mission Possible.' This slogan inspired campaigners and public in some 65 countries around the world - including in 15 States not Party - to take urgent action for a mine-free world. We are sharing this slogan with all of you this year with the hope it will inspire you - as it has inspired our global campaign - to take bold actions in the lead up to the Cartagena Summit and beyond.

What do we mean by 'bold actions' in context of universalization in this crucial year?

- States not Party that have already undertaken steps toward accession or ratification should make the final step and become full members of the Mine Ban Treaty community by the time we meet again in Cartagena;
- All the other States not Party should adhere to the ban-norm immediately and take concrete steps in the lead up to the Cartagena Summit that will ensure their soonest possible accession in the future;
- And very importantly - States Parties should step up their universalization efforts this year and use every opportunity to promote the Convention among States not Party at bilateral high-level meetings, at various regional and international fora, through demarches, and by other means.

Although the rate of adherence to the Mine Ban Treaty with 156 States Party is undoubtedly a success, for the past year and a half we have been disturbed by the standstill on the universalization front: not one single state has joined in since the 8th MSP in November 2007. We are, however, hopeful the tide will turn and States still remaining outside of the Treaty will make final steps to proudly take their seats among States Parties at the Cartagena Summit.

In particular, in the last several months we have been encouraged by the leadership shown by the Lao PDR and Lebanon in the process that led to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and we will continue to work closely together with the two affected states with the hope of welcoming both as new States Parties soon, and possibly even this year.

The ICBL also strongly urges the Federated States of Micronesia to complete its accession process as soon as possible and become the 157th State Party. At the same time we are calling on other states not party in the region to join as soon as possible, and in particular the Marshall Islands - one of the only two remaining signatories, together with Poland, that so far have failed to ratify the Treaty.

While we appreciate Poland's recent decision to bring the ratification three years forward to 2012 from the previously announced 2015 deadline and recognize that Poland is *de facto* complying with most of the provisions of the treaty, we believe it is a very moderate step forward for a country that has been a signatory since 1997 and that announced its readiness to ratify the treaty at the First Review Conference, 5 years ago. We are happy to hear the ratification process was again formally initiated last February but still we can see no reason why it could not be finished earlier than 2012. We continue to call on Poland to complete the ratification process by the 2nd Review Conference. At the very least we expect Poland to have the ratification process well underway by that time and to provide an update on the concrete steps it has taken towards completion of its ratification.

2012 is also the deadline for accession set by Finland, the only other EU member alongside Poland remaining outside the treaty. But it has not shown any positive movement towards the treaty in the past few years. In our view Finland is another case for long overdue accession, and we believe Finland should and could revise its policy in this crucial year making an earlier accession ‘mission possible.’

Mr. Chair, we would like to address once again the claim by some states not party that *de facto* compliance is sufficient: abiding by the provisions of the treaty without accepting to be legally and irreversibly bound by them is simply not good enough. Moreover, some of these states continue practices that *de facto* violate the treaty such as stocking landmines or deriving military benefit from existing minefields. Even countries that have never used antipersonnel mines and have no intention of doing so in the future should join without delay in order to strengthen further the almost universal view that these weapons are simply not acceptable. Not joining means willing to use antipersonnel mines in the future.

The ICBL was hoping that countries belonging to this group such as Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and others would do their part in building a mine-free world by joining the treaty. However, despite earlier very positive steps taken by the three Gulf states, with whom the ICBL has engaged intensively over the past few years, we have recently not only seen lack of further progress, but a general lack of interest or even back-tracking. We are deeply disappointed by this fact and are urging Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates to reengage and take the final step to become parties by the 2nd Review Conference.

For similar reasons we were disappointed with the lack of accession by Mongolia, despite the fact Mongolia had previously declared it would accede in 2008. We are however optimistic and hopeful for quick progress with Mongolia’s recent signs of renewed interest and engagement on this issue. Our national campaign has been actively engaging with the authorities in Ulaanbaatar and the ICBL is planning a visit to Mongolia at the end of June.

Despite the recent internal turbulences in Nepal and Sri Lanka, the ICBL together with our dedicated national campaigns remains hopeful that both countries will continue taking positive steps and be in a position to present a timeline for their accession at the 2nd Review Conference.

Since last year we have been witnessing raised interest vis-à-vis the Mine Ban Treaty in another affected and challenging region – the Caucasus, with Azerbaijan submitting for the first time a voluntary Art. 7 report last year and Georgia reengaging in accession discussions after the conflict in August 2008. The ICBL and its national members have engaged extensively with Azerbaijan and Georgia and are looking forward to seeing positive movements there, such as voluntary submission of transparency reports this year and further announcements at the Review Conference. We hope such actions would not only be the first steps on the way to accession, but also would also foster confidence in the region and set a positive example for other countries in the entire CIS region.

Together with the US campaign the ICBL has been calling on the new administration of the USA to undertake without delay a revision of its policy on landmines and to announce a timeline for accession by the Cartagena Summit. We believe such a review of their outdated policy, as a first step towards accession, should be ‘mission possible’.

We would also like to call on the only two states that until today still continue to actively lay new mines – Myanmar and Russia – to recognize the nearly universal support for the ban norm by immediately halting the use of mines and taking steps toward joining the Convention in the future. The ICBL welcomes the recent positive signs of engagement from the Government of Myanmar and is hopeful to pay an official visit to Myanmar later this year.

Unfortunately, just last week we were deeply disturbed by reports of new use of mines by the Taliban in Pakistan's Swat Valley, which placed civilians at direct risk. We have been calling for immediate halt of mine and for measures to prevent civilian casualties. Similarly, all States Parties should also denounce any new mine use whether by a State or a Non-State Armed Group, as a recognition of the fact that full universalization means adherence to the ban norm by all actors involved in armed conflicts. In this spirit, ICBL members have continued to engage with Non-State Armed Groups. Recently this engagement paid off with renouncement of landmine use by a group from Northern India and by two Kurdish groups from Iran, who signed the Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment earlier this year.

The ICBL will continue to spare no effort towards full universalization of the Treaty on the road to Cartagena and stands ready to work together with all willing States not Party and States Parties to ensure the Mine Ban Treaty community has grown and become stronger by the Cartagena Summit. We have no doubt this is 'mission possible'.

Last but certainly not least, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all States Party who have been engaged in universalization work, and especially Canada – the Coordinator of the Universalization Contact Group, for its remarkable dedication and determination in pursuing universalization of the Mine Ban Treaty, and thus a 'mine-free world.'

Thank you.