ICBL Comments on Mine Clearance
12th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty
Geneva, Switzerland
5 December 2012

Thanks very much to States Parties for the reports on your accomplishments and to the President for this opportunity to provide comments. In the interest of time, we will not comment on all presentations, but only those where we have questions or concerns.

But first, Mr. President, we would like to start with a few general comments.

When the 9th Meeting of States Parties adopted the set of recommendations to facilitate the application of all available methods to achieve the full, efficient and expedient implementation of Article 5, or land release, ICBL applauded and strongly welcomed this important step forward.

However, in the years since the adoption of those recommendations we still see a number of weaknesses that put the implementation of Art 5 at risk. These include, but are not limited to:

- Persistent overstatement of the genuine level of contamination in many cases
- National plans, standards and SOPs not incorporating the principles of Land Release
- Far too much full clearance happening on land that is actually not contaminated

To ensure full, efficient and expedient implementation of article 5, these recommendations need to be integrated into international and national standards and regulatory frameworks, as well as within operator's procedures and donor requirements.

A related problem is that of inaccurate and incomplete reporting by affected states, which leaves other States Parties without a clear picture of what has been accomplished. The Cartagena Action Plan commits States Parties to breaking down land released by clearance, non-technical survey or technical survey. Without such information, we cannot know what land was fully cleared, released by survey or simply cancelled because of a lack of evidence of contamination.

States Parties that have received extensions have also been requested to report on progress on the plans submitted with their extension request. Most states laid out clear milestones in the plans, and we urge them to report on progress measured against those benchmarks, something we have not been hearing this morning. The President's recommendations on the extension request process this year should make it even clearer that this information is needed by including benchmarks in the analyses and decisions on requests and conducting mid-term progress reviews.

This issue is particularly relevant for **Chad** and the **DRC**. Because the reports given today did not compare work with projected milestones, it is not possible to know if they are on track to have a full picture of contamination on time to make a new request, which will hopefully take them to completion.

Mozambique: The ICBL was pleased to take part in Mozambique's national workshop in October, where Mozambique set a great model by gathering representatives of the national government, mine action operators, donors and other stakeholders to discuss how to work towards completion. Given the lack of precise information on contamination along the border with Zimbabwe, it could be possible that Mozambique would not be able to finish clearance by its extended deadline. So while we have no doubt Mozambique is doing its best to finish on time, we would like to recall what we said earlier today: if a state has doubts about its ability to complete clearance by its deadline, we would prefer to see it ask for another short extension rather than miss the deadline.

Yemen: We hear far too rarely from Yemen. It was good to hear that operations have started up again in the north and that demining capacity is being increased. We have a question relative to Yemen's Article 7 report, which indicates that the remaining suspected area amounted to 138.4km2, while areas identified as "ongoing," "suspended," or "left" as of 31 March 2012 amounted to a total of more than 330km². What do those designations mean, and when does Yemen plan to clear those areas?

Senegal: We have continuously expressed concern about the slow pace of demining progress, and while we are glad to see the doubling of clearance in the past year, we still hope to see much greater progress in the future. In addition, it is unclear if Senegal is on track to finish clearance by its extended deadline because it did not present a clear mine action plan with its extension request so there is nothing to measure progress against. For this reason, we had encouraged Senegal to submit a plan to the 12MSP showing how the remaining work will be finished by its new deadline. We hope such a plan could be presented by the 2013 intersessional meetings.

Algeria: We were glad to hear that Algeria is respecting its duty to clear all mined areas, including those it had previously intended to preserve for historical purposes, and that it is on track to complete clearance by its extended deadline.

Ecuador and **Peru**: The close collaboration on mine clearance between Ecuador and Peru is an excellent model for other states, and we appreciate the information they have shared on their cooperation, including through the side event this week. At the same time, this process has resulted in new information that Ecuador has an additional 13 SHAs and Peru has an additional 48 areas. We would appreciate more information on how those areas can be cleared by their respective deadlines given current rates of productivity.

Thailand: We are still not seeing sufficient signs of political support needed to tackle the problem. Thailand's extension request planned for an annual national contribution of $50 million leading to 50km2 being released annually. But such a rate of spending has not nearly been achieved, which has led Thailand to fall far behind schedule. The regular change in personnel at TMAC is also damaging to its capacity to implement its plan, which was one reason why it had been planned to change to civilian management, a change we still encourage. We also urge Thailand to redo its database to establish a more realistic picture of the remaining problem based on land release principles and the work being done in Thailand by international operators. Such data should be used to revise the demining plan, which should be resubmitted to States Parties. Finally, we were very pleased to hear about progress on the joint working group with Cambodia on border clearance, and we hope that demining in contested areas can begin soon.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: This is another case where the revision of the mine action plan would be useful. In its Article 5 extension request submitted in 2008, Bosnia and Herzegovina estimated that by the start of 2013, it would have 1,004km2 of suspected contaminated land remaining, but instead it has 1274km2 remaining to release, which represents a significant difference. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre informed Landmine Monitor in March 2012 that it was in the process of reviewing performance and revising the 2009–2019 strategy – what is the status of that revision?

Croatia: It sounds like Croatia is falling behind its clearance plan, but it is unclear whether the targets presented are from the original plan submitted with its request, or the revised plan presented subsequently to States Parties. Clarity on those targets at the 2013 intersessionals would be useful.

United Kingdom: We welcome the United Kingdom's statement of commitment to its Article 5 obligations and the announcement of further clearance in 2013. At the same time, we are still disappointed with the very slow rate of progress and lack of clear plans for meeting its extended deadline.

We look forward to hearing of such plans in May. We also have a question: it sounded from the statement as if there was only anecdotal evidence of mines in some of the areas to be cleared. If so, why is full clearance on them planned? Using proper land release techniques could speed up release of these sites and any others with no concrete evidence of mines.

Cambodia: As part of the decision on Cambodia's extension request, it committed to submit a clearance plan based on the baseline survey (BLS) by the end of this year. Given the large amount of AP-mine affected areas already identified by the BLS, we hope such a plan can be presented at the 2013 intersessional meetings. In addition, we would like to repeat the point raised with Thailand earlier, that collaboration and demining the contested border between both states is key to avoiding further casualties in those areas.

Colombia: We hope that the accreditation process for civilian deminers will move along quickly so the operators can begin to work as soon as possible in areas deemed safe for their activities.

Other States Parties in the process of implementing Article 5

We were disappointed to hear that again such a high percentage of States Parties plan to ask for an extension in the coming years.

Turkey: Turkey has been very slow to fulfill its obligations under Article 5. Eight years after joining the treaty, it still has not begun demining its largest mine-affected area and has only conducted limited clearance elsewhere. Bureaucratic red tape was given as an explanation, but this is not a sufficient reason to delay clearing this critical area, and we encourage Turkey to act with greater urgency. In addition, while it was good to hear that there are now plans to clear additional border areas, we would like to hear more details on timing plus its plans to clear the 77,984 mines that it has reported are emplaced outside of border areas. Finally, Turkey has not reported in sufficient detail on either the remaining contamination or the clearance it has undertaken to date. In this regard, we encourage Turkey to report not just in the number of mines to be cleared, but also the estimated size of the areas to be released.

Burundi: We are puzzled to hear about reports of suspected mined areas since we understood that Burundi declared completion of Article 5 at the 11MSP. Could additional information be provided to clarify the situation?

Iraq: We find it troubling that four years after it acceded to the treaty, Iraq, one of the world's most heavily affected countries, still does not have a clear plan on how it will fulfill its Article 5 obligations. This is surely connected with the lack of an effective institutional framework for mine action that can, for example, coordinate mine action stakeholders, plan and prioritize clearance, uphold international standards, and report and manage data. We are pleased to hear of Iraq's commitment to devote more attention to mine action in the future. Doing so will hopefully address these issues and should help with resource mobilization, which Iraq raised as a concern.

Somalia: We welcome Somalia's detailed and comprehensive first report as a State Party. We hope with sufficient international support, AP mine clearance will be able to advance in south-central Somalia as well.

Niger: We hope the governments of Niger and France can collaborate to ensure there is full knowledge of any mines that may have been laid around former French military bases. We also applaud the government of Niger for working with the former combatants of the Mouvement des Nigeriens pour la Justice in the identification of mines areas and planned clearance. We encourage them to continue such collaboration to ensure all mined areas are found and cleared.