

**Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Awareness and Related Technologies of the  
Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of  
Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.**

Geneva, 11 February 2004.

View on the state of implementation of matters pertaining to art. 5, by Bill Howell,  
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International Campaign to Ban Landmines - ICBL.

The purpose of this intervention is to introduce a few ideas into our discussions that appear to us to provide a possible conceptual base for consideration of the future of Mine Action in the context of the upcoming Review Conference and beyond.

Let us consider three sets of related terms or concepts.

- Exit // Achievement
- Mine impact free // Mine free
- Impact // control

These sets of concepts can be linked together in various ways. These terms or concepts are also used and understood by different persons in different ways. Depending on how we understand them, and choose among them, can possibly have an impact on future Mine Action. So this intervention is aimed at contributing to our discussions by suggesting ways to use and apply these concepts.

The set **Exit // Achievement** applies for our purpose here today; to Mine Action at, at least, two levels:

The first level is related to how we define and view the criteria for the shape of the desirable and acceptable end-state for Mine Action in a given affected country. That is, when do we know that we are done? Among other things, when has large scale international intervention (actors, financing) done enough and created a situation where it can scale down and withdraw, leaving a residual that can be reasonably addressed by the affected country on its own. This is also the level at which we really need to get serious about “capacity” and “capacity building”; commonly used words which themselves lack a certain clarity of meaning. What capacity? In what condition? And to do what, exactly...?

The second level where Exit as opposed to Achievement should concern us is at the international level. We are concerned in this meeting with developing the message we want to pass to the community of States Parties at the Review conference. How will we define our current situation and progress to date, and give a positive view of the way forward for the next five years – or more - for Mine Action?

**Exit** is about leaving. There is a lot of talk now, and particularly in regard to countries where Mine Action has been in place for a number of years, about “exit strategies”. Donors are insisting now that we tell them what our “exit strategy” is. The problem, at least for NGO actors, and I suspect others, is that we don’t have a very clear idea of what to leave

behind. As a term, “Exit” tells us nothing about the state in which we leave things; be it fully completed or a shambles.

If we are going to talk about an end, a more positive concept to use would be “achievement”. The term implies a goal and that something will be accomplished. So, if instead of exit strategy, we can begin to talk about “achievement strategy” then, already, we are much closer to knowing what we are talking about. Achievement is what we want to accomplish and *demands* a definition of an end-state that we find mutually satisfactory. Once we have agreed on the shape of the situation we intend to achieve and leave behind, the questions of what “capacity” is, and how to build it, and what needs remain in terms of time and input become a great deal easier to answer. Put another way, achievement is about objectives, exit is not.

Another word about achievement in the context of what we would like the States to know at the Review Conference: We hear about “donor fatigue”; we hear that Mine Action is less sexy than it was and must now compete with other sectoral concerns which have come up. We hear that there is less money to go around now, and even that there is a certain dissatisfaction with how far or how well (or not) Mine Action has progressed towards containing the landmine problem.

If we go to the Review Conference ready to agree with this, even in part, we are in some way encouraging a tendency toward an “exit” mentality over an “achievement” mentality. We have achieved a great deal and will no doubt say so, but that is not the point here. Most of what we have achieved so far has been to learn how to do this thing called Mine Action. We have learned about tools and methodologies through trial and error and this has cost us time and money. An Exit mentality now would debase all of those lessons; all of that investment of time and effort. However, our experience now gives us every reason to think that future Mine Action will be far more cost efficient and more productive than in the past. Therefore what we should be saying is that the results we can show over the next period of time are likely to be far greater than those in the past. It hasn’t been a waste; it’s been an investment. Now is the time to encourage an “achievement mentality”, and to demonstrate that we have the will to profit from that investment and to do what we set out to do.

**Mine impact free** and **Mine Free** are terms we hear in use frequently. In some ways they act interchangeably as the global objectives for Mine Action.

It is important to admit that we are here today, and working everyday, because of the Ottawa Accords. And these accords set out very clearly that the intended end-state – that is, the ultimate objective of our work – is a world *free* of mines. All of the States Parties therefore have an obligation to move toward the goal of Mine Free. Nevertheless, experience has now taught us that it will be a long process to achieve this. So, without actually admitting it, there is a tendency to move the goalpost, replacing Mine Free with Mine Impact Free. The problem is that no one has yet clearly defined what Mine Impact Free really means.

Using various methods, we are accustomed today to a triage of dangerous and suspected sites into zones which in some way have been arbitrarily scored as having high, medium or low impact. LIS and other surveys now tend to do this as a means to facilitate prioritisation and contribute to a rational and efficient distribution of the means available. The accepted approach is then to proceed with the appropriate treatment of all high and medium impact zones, leaving low impact areas for later, and for some as yet poorly defined

residual Mine Action capacity. The temptation is to call this state “impact free”, thereby allowing us to exit. There are problems with this approach:

- 1) logically, an area defined as low impact nevertheless has impact, per se.
- 2) the weighting criteria or local social and economic conditions may change rapidly over time, shifting some low impact areas into the medium or high range (a single accident will do this).

But these are relatively minor problems. More, importantly and practically:

- 3) the number of zones designated as low impact is always far greater than the number of high and medium impact zones together. One characteristic of these zones is that they are usually relatively small. Another characteristic is that they tend to be scattered, pretty much at random, throughout the territory. Control of them over time may be difficult to manage for a country with a reduced operational and financial means.

As a definitive end-state, impact free is unacceptable. It is not what the obligations of Ottawa require, and it cannot guarantee more than a short-term promise of relief. As an intermediate end-state, it also has problems, at least as a concept, and very likely in practice. If we can agree that Mine Free is our ultimate goal and will remain so, we might also agree that rational use of resources means an end to large-scale international intervention at some point. This means – in the context of an achievement strategy, that there needs to be a defined intermediate goal. There is not a name for this yet, but mine impact free is misleading and should be replaced.

This brings us to the concepts of **impact** and **control**.

It's useful to recall a statement made about the objective of Mine Action in Kosovo. The goal was (I paraphrase) to use the means available to bring the landmine and UXO problem in Kosovo to a point where it had no more impact in that province than similar residual problems did elsewhere in western Europe.

In western Europe, which, for the sake of argument we could reasonably call an impact free zone, the key was and is not impact. In fact the key is control. Hazardous areas in western European countries are largely well marked, permanently fenced, and the means and will to maintain this interdiction for the public to enter or utilize these zones is available and continually applied. It is useful to note that many of these areas were, and could be again, productive areas contributing to the common good. But the decision has been made that they will not be until the day when they are cleared by one means or another. Meanwhile, most of the territory is free of known risk and provides other option and alternatives for fulfilling social and economic need.

Another aspect is that these areas are largely concentrated and discreet from the rest of the territory. In between, right up to the fence, as it were, there is, essentially, no known danger. It's interesting to imagine what the risk map of a western European country would look like now if an impact system – adapted to the economic and social conditions of the immediate era - was used as the means of deciding when and where to conduct post-war depollution. And there, imagine how the map of currently impacted countries will look if we leave them with literally hundreds of small dangerous areas scattered at random across

their territory. The risk situation – and therefore freedom from impact - will be more difficult to guarantee because it will be more difficult and complicated to control and track.

So, in thinking this way, if there is no obvious and immediate pressure for using an area, and where alternatives exist, the notion of control may in fact be more important than the notion of any particular impact measure. Priority on creating a situation where the residual problem is controlled, confined and consolidated may actually provide us with the easiest, cheapest and most sustainable way to define an acceptable intermediate achievement; an acceptable approximation of impact free. From there it should be easier to rationally decide what is needed in the longer term to achieve Mine Free.

So we have discussed Exit and Achievement, and it seems clear that Exit is inadequate and that a strategy base on defined Achievement is not only more positive and pro-active, but also provides us with the means to get serious about what “capacity” and “capacity building” really mean and require.

We have discussed Mine Impact Free and Mine Free and agreed that Mine Free must remain the ultimate goal. We have also argued that Mine Impact Free is unacceptable as an ultimate goal, since among other things it tends to blur the intention of the Ottawa Accords. Impact Free also has problems as concept in terms of an intermediate goal. We have discussed impact and control and seen that the concept of control may offer a reasonable and perhaps even faster and more efficient means to reach an interim end-state for Mine Action in a given country.

This has been a conceptual discussion, and there are of course many ways to go from here, and many details that would have to be worked out. But it is hoped that working from the concepts of Achievement, Mine Free and control this community can send a positive message to the Review Conference and fully capitalise over the next years on the investments of time and effort of the past.

Looking ahead to this task, I would like to leave you with the following thought – attributed to Yogi Berra, an American baseball player of the 1950s and 60s – who also had a considerable reputation as a folk-philosopher:

In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice.  
In practice, there is.

Thank you.