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Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Awareness, and Mine Action Technologies

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Since the presentation by the ICBL representative was so comprehensive, I propose to be brief and to allow time for discussion. My presentation will distil some of the concerns and information needs of donor countries, but it will also touch on some of what I would call the “internal logic” of the Ottawa Convention.

The point of the Ottawa Convention was to achieve results. It was not simply a “regulatory convention” of infinite duration. It was designed to solve the landmine problem, “in years, not decades”.

In keeping with this approach, the provisions of the Convention are both practical and reasonable. “Use” of landmines is banned immediately upon entry into force of the Convention. Destruction of stockpiles is afforded a four-year time frame, which, in all but the most difficult cases, is more than adequate. Then we come to mine clearance.

Over the past five years we’ve come a long way in our understanding of mine clearance. We’ve come to understand, for example, that it’s not simply the number of mines in the ground that makes for a problem. It is the nature of the land, its normal usage, the communities disadvantaged, and the economic and social consequences.

With this in mind, we have developed new tools over the past several years. Possibly the most valued, certainly among the donor community, is the level one survey, or the mine impact survey, which endeavours to answer a key question: what are the priorities in a

given country?

We now have, in the Convention and in general usage, two sets of data collection. The first is Article 7 reporting, which obliges States Parties to report on mined areas and efforts being made to clear them, amongst other things. The second set of data emanates from those working on respective mine problems, from the UN and other organizations, from the NGO community, and mine action centres in various countries.

In our view we should look at the 10 year time period identified in the Convention as the basic framework for addressing mine clearance in each country. We then need, in all cases where there is mined land -- but especially in those cases where there is a significant mine problem -- a coherent approach to mine clearance, based on sound data.

What does this signify in terms of the tools we need:

- First, it means we need a baseline document that lays out the problem and the priorities -- such as an impact survey or its equivalent.
- Second, we need a game plan which integrates all of the players and activities. While this normally calls for the establishment of a mine action centre, many states will have a somewhat more nuanced approach, achieving the same objectives.
- Third, we need operators involved in the game plan, in all relevant fields of mine action, including those involved in technologies. It is probably here, at the outset of planning, that technologies can be introduced to the greatest advantage.
- Fourth, we need donor support in helping countries to assess and address mine action priorities. Donor countries are pressed to focus priorities, and may have a limited

attention span. Most want to be involved at the outset of a program, addressing the higher priority items. Very few want to close out a program as it addresses low priority, longer-term items.

- Fifth, we need affected States to comply annually with their obligations under Article 7, in many ways marrying the information gained on the ground with a Convention obligation to report on progress being made in implementing Article 5.

Returning to the “logic” of the Convention, what should we be thinking about now?

This Standing Committee provides the opportunity for taking stock, of evaluating where we stand and where we should be going next. We need to take stock of the tools and data available to assure a clear understanding of needs and identification of the resources necessary for mine action over the coming years. This exercise needs to be based on solid data and information.

Some of these requirements can be summarized in the form of a check-list. For example, do we have, first of all:

- A clear understanding of which States Parties are both mine affected and require assistance? Theoretically, this information should flow from Article 7 reporting.

Then, for each case identified do we have:

- Mine impact surveys or their equivalent if deemed necessary?
- Mine action centres or other necessary coordinating bodies?
- A long-term program of work complete with priorities and

time-lines?

- An information management system -- like IMSMA or equivalent -- that will be able to track progress and provide necessary information to all key actors?
- Information on key programs and the involvement of key organizations and institutions on the ground?
- And, finally, adequate financial arrangements?

While the comments I have made relate more to a global overview of understanding needs, resources and progress in affected countries, let me make one additional suggestion at the more “micro” or local level.

As a donor country, Canada has found that possibly the most productive relationships in the mine action area are between mine action centres and the local embassies or offices of donor countries. Local embassies often have access to financial resources on the spot, or can help in the process of resource mobilization, particularly for smaller projects. Local embassies can also lobby headquarters organizations for increased funding or changes in programming. Local embassies know the major donors, and generally major donors cooperate well amongst each other.

We therefore need to ensure that, while information on mine action exists at the global level, it is also comprehensively organized and widely accessible at the local level, preferably through a mine action centre or the equivalent, and at best through cooperation with UN organizations.

Finally, we must bear in mind that sustaining the interest and attention of our colleagues in capitals on landmines issues is a challenge. We therefore require a collective sense of urgency and priorities.

The 10 year time frame is not magic. It is simply a reasonable period

to organize, implement and complete mine clearance in mine-affected countries. We must ensure that we organize our work to ensure that the 10 year period is well used, and that very few countries, if any, return to us at the end of a decade with the requirement to extend their period of obligation.

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